

PLUCK AND LUCK

COMPLETE
STORIES OF ADVENTURE.

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THE BOY PRAIRIE COURIER; OR, GENERAL CUSTER'S YOUNGEST AIDE.

(A TRUE STORY OF THE BATTLE AT LITTLE BIG HORN.) BY AN OLD SCOUT.



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A TRUE STORY OF THE BATTLE AT LITTLE BIG HORN

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CHAPTER I.

A BRAVE BOY BRINGS GEN. CUSTER THRILLING NEWS.

Two mounted Indians had halted on the summit of a wooded hill, several days' journey due northwest of Fort Lincoln, in the Yellowstone country.

It was in the spring, and the grass was well up, so the prairie presented an appearance of the most pleasing character, for the vast expanse of emerald hue was studded with brilliant flowers.

The sun was scarcely visible, and through the red glow of the dawn the two Indians gazed fixedly eastward.

"Wah! The morning campfires of the horse soldiers are yonder!" uttered the taller redskin, extending a muscular hand, to point out the faint smoke-clouds afar, which would not have been discovered by civilized eyes.

"The great chief has eyes like the eagle. Rain-in-the-Face sees the little smokes, too. Yellow Hair, the white soldier chief, is there."

The soft breeze of the morning fluttered the tall plumes of the head-dress worn by the warrior who had first spoken.

Silence ensued while the redskins continued to watch the "smoke signs" in the east.

Gen. Custer, with the Seventh Cavalry, was on the march from Fort Lincoln against the Sioux who had taken to the warpath, defied the government, and threatened to exterminate the settlers of the far northwest.

It was the morning fires of Gen. Custer's command which the Sioux had sighted.

In the rear of the two Indians, the foliage of a dense clump of bushes was softly parted, and a bright young face appeared, and a pair of keen, dark eyes glanced stealthily at the two red warriors.

Just at that instant the positions of the Indians were such that the spy in the bushes could not see their faces.

But he noted that both were in full war-dress, and that the taller wore the eagle plumes of a head chief.

The occupant of the thicket was a mere lad—a white boy—probably scarcely more than seventeen.

He wore a well-fitting suit of Indian-tanned deerskin, the

shirt handsomely fringed and beaded, as were also the outside seams of his leggings.

His dark, handsome face was the very picture of rugged health, and his hair fell in graceful, wavy masses from underneath his broad hat upon his shapely shoulders.

In his hands he carried a splendid repeating rifle, and in his broad leather belt there was a revolver and a hunting-knife.

Suddenly the tall Sioux chief turned.

The boy dodged back out of sight, his heart beating like a trip-hammer with excitement.

But he was not discovered, while he obtained a view of the tall redskin's face.

"Sitting Bull himself!" uttered the lad, under his breath, as he made the recognition.

It was one which thrilled him.

He knew Sitting Bull was the most daring, obstinate, and implacable of all the Indians of the northwest.

When the whole Sioux nation made peace with the whites, when Red Cloud and Spotted Tail, with all their braves, had come in and settled on the agencies, Sitting Bull alone held out.

"Come, we will go back to camp. At nightfall the Yellow-Haired chief and his horse soldiers will be at the place where we will ambush them. They will follow the big trail the red men have made to lead them on," said Sitting Bull.

"Wah! and Rain-in-the-Face will keep his oath. He will kill the Yellow-Haired chief!" replied the other, fiercely, in the Sioux tongue.

A year previously Rain-in-the-Face had been arrested by Gen. Custer's orders for the murder of two white men and confined at Fort Lincoln.

The bloodthirsty Sioux made his escape after the general had extorted a confession from him, and he succeeded in reaching the hostiles under Sitting Bull in safety.

"Maybe it's Yellowstone Jack that 'ull spoil your plans, Mr. Redskin," said the boy in the thicket to himself. "I've started to join Gen. Custer, and now I shall carry him a warning," he added.

He had left his horse concealed at a short distance, and

he was creeping away toward the animal when a stick snapped under his feet.

"Wah! Someone there!" exclaimed Rain-in-the-Face.

And the red fiend made a flying leap into the thicket. He alighted very near the white boy, and Sitting Bull came crashing into the cover after his favorite war chief.

The white lad was discovered.

Uttering a shrill, peculiar whistle, he bounded forward, and the great chief of the Sioux nation and his lieutenant rushed in pursuit.

The boy heard Sitting Bull exclaim excitedly, in the Sioux tongue:

"The white boy spy must lose his scalp! He must not get away to join the Yellow-Haired chief and tell him the words of Sitting Bull and his brother!"

Rain-in-the-Face raised his rifle.

But before he could send a bullet at the white boy fugitive, the latter sprang behind a tree.

The whip-like report of his Winchester sounded upon the instant, and the leaden missile clipped the feathers in Rain-in-the-Face's head-dress.

"Wah ho!" yelled the Sioux, bounding behind a tree-trunk, while Sitting Bull sought shelter in the same manner.

There came a crashing sound from the undergrowth in the rear of the white youth's position almost immediately.

He repeated his shrill, peculiar whistle.

And a magnificent black horse dashed to the side of the lad. The fine animal was the boy's own well-trained steed.

"Good boy! Just in time!" cried the youth, leaping into the saddle, and throwing himself along the side of the noble animal furthest from the enemy, he thundered away.

The two Sioux chiefs fired at the daring boy simultaneously, but neither the youth nor his horse were hit. Unscathed, the latter bore his young master down the wooded hillside at the top of equine speed.

A moment and the black horse and his young rider emerged from the timber.

Out upon the open plains the boy glanced anxiously in every direction.

He feared there were some of the hostile braves of Sitting Bull's band near.

And he half anticipated an attempt would be made to cut him off from Gen. Custer's command when he showed himself beyond the timber.

But no. That morning Sitting Bull and Rain-in-the-Face were scouting alone.

The white lad saw nothing to indicate the proximity of other hostiles.

The Sioux chiefs had left their horses half a mile away, and so the white lad had a chance for his life. While his red foes were racing away for their mustangs, the boy rode on and on, his bright eyes ever fixed upon the little smoke clouds which hovered about Gen Custer's camp.

When the two Sioux had reached their animals and ridden in pursuit of the white lad for some distance, they saw that it was useless to attempt to run him down.

His tall, long-limbed black horse was so vastly superior to the ponies bestrode by the redskins in point of speed, that he rapidly increased his lead.

Sitting Bull and Rain-in-the-Face soon turned back.

The boy rode on. Suddenly a mounted man appeared out of a gully before him, and the youth recognized the blue uniform of a United States cavalryman.

He uttered a shout and spurred forward.

The solitary trooper, so far from camp, seemed alarmed and surprised. Evidently he took the boy for an enemy. But strangely enough, he did not retreat toward the camp of the bluecoats.

Yet he sought to avoid the approaching lad by taking a course at right angles with what the youth was following.

But the great black horse soon brought the boy up alongside the cavalryman. One glance at his swarthy face told the boy he was a half-breed.

"You are one of Custer's scouts, I take it?" cried the youth.

"Yes, me out looking for 'signs.' Boy come from West. Did him see any hostiles?" responded the half-breed, readily, but the boy thought he acted nervous and strange.

"Sitting Bull himself is in the hills yonder. But what made you run away from me? You could see plain enough I was not a hostile," replied the youth.

The half-breed mumbled some unintelligible rejoinder. Then he said:

"Me go on little further."

"Look out for your scalp then—I'm going right on to camp!" admonished the boy.

Then he wheeled his horse and rode on without halting until he came to the picket line about the camp of the troopers.

The half-breeds were often useful as scouts, and Gen. Custer had a score of them with his command.

The boy rider had heard of that, and so he supposed the commander had sent out the scout he had met.

But no sooner had the youth ridden on, after his meeting with the half-breed, than the latter said:

"Now for the lodge of the white fire-water trader—the friend of Sitting Bull—I have the news he wants."

He pressed on into the wooded hills, seemingly without fear of the hostiles, and as it chanced, he encountered none of them.

He had a long journey before him, but at length he arrived at a large log house, inclosed by a stockade.

The half-breed had been sighted afar by the owner of the log-house, and the door opened for the new arrival without delay.

Barnabas Zadok was the somewhat singular name claimed by the ranchman. He was a tall, heavily-bearded man, of the white race, clad in semi-Indian costume and heavily armed.

He had made a private treaty with Sitting Bull, and was the friend of the hostiles, with whom he had established a flourishing trade. The arch scoundrel had also acted as the agent of the Sioux in purchasing ammunition and arms in quantities, which the government would not have sold to any Indian.

A score of border ruffians of the worst type were the banded henchmen of the renegade, and they garrisoned the stockade.

"Well, Soldier Fox, my friend, what news?" demanded the renegade rancher.

"The white squaw is with the soldiers of the Yellow-Haired chief who are coming. Soldier Fox deserted before day dawned, taking Custer's best horse. The Whisky Chief gave him gold to join the pale-face as a scout to act as a spy for him."

"Do you mean Custer is coming here—to this ranch after me—with that girl—Ethel Readon?" cried the renegade.

"Yes. Custer thinks. but is not sure, you are the man he wants for the murder of Paymaster Readon, the white squaw's father. Soldier Fox hear Yellow-Haired chief say the white squaw was the only person who clearly saw face of the man who shot her father at Fort Lincoln to steal him gold."

"Ha! I see it all. Custer means old Readon's daughter shall identify me. But it shall not be! While that girl lives I am in peril of the gallows, and yet, fool that I am, I love her—the daughter of my murdered victim—fiercely, desperately."

Soldier Fox, the half-breed, showed his white teeth in a tigerish grin as he said:

"What Whisky Chief do? Me think he no wait for Custer to come and arrest him?"

"No. Do you ride at once to Sitting Bull's hidden camp and then lead your band of the hostiles to steal the white girl away from the soldiers, and if you succeed bring her to the headquarters of the hostiles, where I will be in waiting. I shall desert this ranch to-night."

"Wah! Soldier Fox will do it. He has white blood in his veins, but his heart is all red, and he hates the race of his father who left his mother to starve," answered the half-breed, fiercely.

He was given food and drink, and when he had partaken of both, a fresh horse was provided him, and he set out for Sitting Bull's camp.

Meantime, the white lad who had overheard the plot of Sitting Bull and Rain-in-the-Face to ambush Custer's command that night, was halted by the first picket of the troopers' camp who discovered him.

"I want to see Gen. Custer!" shouted the boy, making the "peace sign" of the prairie as the bluecoat leveled his carbine at him.

"Who are you, and what do you want with the general?" demanded the trooper.

"I have news of the hostiles, and it's mighty important."

"All right. Pass on."

The trooper lowered his carbine and the lad rode into camp.

A trooper conducted him to Gen. Custer.

The dashing cavalry officer stood at the door of his tent. Tall, finely formed, with a handsome, resolute face, his fair hair flying to the breeze, he presented a striking picture.

The boy from the country of the hostiles regarded the great Indian fighter with a look of intense admiration.

"This lad has just come into camp, and he says he brings news of the hostiles," said the trooper at the youth's side, as he saluted his commander.

"Indeed! What news do you bring me?" asked the general, speaking very pleasantly as he turned his fine blue eyes upon the boy.

"Old Sitting Bull and Rain-in-the-Face were in the hills up yonder a few hours ago, and I overheard 'em say they meant to attack you to-night," replied the boy.

"We shall be ready for the red devils. So Rain-in-the-Face is with the chief of the hostiles? That rascal owes me a grudge."

"He said to Sitting Bull that he meant to kill you."

"Ha, ha, ha! He is not the first redskin who has made that vow. I do not fear him."

"You are following a plain trail, made by a band of the hostiles, are you not, general?"

"Yes. Why do you ask?"

"The Sioux made that trail purposely to lead you to a place which will be a favorable situation for an ambush. They count on your going into camp to-night just where they want you."

"Then we'll disappoint them. Ah, what is it, Curley?"

The general turned to a Crow Indian, who served him as a scout, as the latter came up and made a sign to attract the officer's attention.

"Wah! Bad news. Soldier Fox, the half-breed Sioux, am gone. Him stole Yellow-Haired chief's best hoss. Curley sure Soldier Fox have gone to join Sitting Bull. Me no think half-breed Sioux true to white man all along," said the Crow scout.

"I met the rascal. He made for the lines of the hostiles. If I had only known he was a deserter!" cried the boy.

CHAPTER II.

THE AMBUSH IN THE GULLY.

"The Sioux half-breed must be pursued. If he reaches the hostiles he will give them information as to our numbers and our plans. My expedition will fail of its object, I fear, if Sitting Bull hears what Soldier Fox can tell him!" cried Gen. Custer.

"How far from camp did you meet the half-breed?" he added, turning to the boy.

"Only a few miles."

"Curley, take your scouts and be off after the half-breed deserter at once," ordered the general.

"Wah! Me go! But think no catch Soldier Fox."

"I know the whole Sioux country. Let me go with the scouts. I may be of use to them!" said the boy eagerly, as Curley, the Crow, hurried away to call up his band of friendly Indian scouts.

"All right. But a word or two with you first. Tell me your name and all about yourself. It seems strange a mere lad like you should be ranging the country of the hostiles alone."

"My name is Jack Shelby, but the hunters and scouts of the northwest call me Yellowstone Jack. My parents were slain by the Sioux. An old scout adopted me. He had an Indian wife, and the reds were friendly with him. Since I was six years of age I've lived mostly among the redskins and the white trappers."

"Where is your foster-father now?"

"Dead, and his wife, who is a Sioux, has joined Sitting Bull's band. I had to join the hostiles and fight against my own race or run away."

"So you came to me?"

"Yes. And when old Wahnatach, my late Indian foster-mother, finds out what I've done, she'll wish she had taken my scalp. She gave me more blows than words of kindness always, and I hated her. She is reputed a big medicine woman, and has some influence with Sitting Bull."

"You speak the Sioux language?"

"Yes."

"That's good. You may yet be very useful to me. I need a courier and aide to bear dispatches, and carry orders in the field. If you wish to follow the fortunes of this expedition, I will appoint you my aide, and you shall be my Boy Prairie Courier."

"Thank you, general. That will just suit me," replied the boy, with kindling eyes.

"Now, I want to question you further. Sitting Bull's stronghold is supposed to be somewhere between the Big Horn and Powder rivers, far beyond the hills in which you saw the Sioux. Is this correct?"

"Yes, general. But little good will that information do you if you don't know the location of the headquarters of the hostiles more definitely. But I know exactly where the Sioux are massing their forces."

"Better and better! I want to surprise Sitting Bull. You shall be my guide!" cried Custer, enthusiastically.

"Sitting Bull will have a great army at his back. All the last few months he has been receiving reinforcements."

"Where from?"

"Why, from all the large Indian agencies along the Missouri, where the reds are fed, clothed and armed by the government. Numbers of these Indians have gone off across the plains to join Sitting Bull."

"Are you sure of that, Jack?"

"Certainly, for I have seen many of them. They go in small

squads, with two or three ponies apiece, carrying nothing but themselves and arms."

"Have you ever been in Sitting Bull's hidden camp?"

"No. But I have heard my Indian foster-mother—the old medicine woman—say just where it was. The old woman did not intend to tell me the secret. I overheard her conversing with one of Sitting Bull's runners."

Just then the general turned, as a musical voice from the rear greeted him with a cheerful "good-morning."

"Good-morning, Miss Readon," responded Custer, lifting his hat gallantly.

Yellowstone Jack, who had just been appointed Gen. Custer's youngest aide, saw a beautiful young girl of seventeen, who had issued forth from a tent near that of the commander.

"Is there any news?" continued the young lady.

"Yes," replied the officer, and he imparted the intelligence which the boy had brought him.

"Ah! Perhaps this youth can tell us something about the man you suspect was my father's assassin at Fort Lincoln," said Ethel Readon.

"True, I had not thought of that."

The general turned to Jack and asked:

"Do you know a man called Barnabas Zadok?"

"Yes. He is a whisky trader and a renegade. His ranch is about thirty miles due northwest. Zadok is a villain of the worst sort, and he is hand and glove with the hostiles."

"I have heard of the rascal. You know, Miss Ethel, I mean to arrest Zadok if you identify him as the man who killed your father. At your request I consented to let you accompany the expedition as far as the ranch of the renegade. Whether he proves to be the man you saw fire the fatal shot at your father or not, you will be sent back to the fort from Zadok's ranch under a strong escort. If you identify the renegade as the assassin he shall be carried a prisoner to the fort by the men who return there with you," said the general.

"Here come the Indian scouts!" cried Jack, a moment subsequently.

Curley, the Crow, dashed up at the head of a dozen "friendlies." They were Delawares, Shawnees, and Cherokees. Curley was the only one of the Crow tribe in the band.

The Crow drew rein before Custer, to receive his last orders.

They were hastily given.

Then the general said: "This boy, Yellowstone Jack, will go with you. I have appointed him my aide."

He indicated the young "prairie courier," who wheeled his fine black horse into line with the ponies of the scouts.

The band trotted out of camp at once, and Curley, the Crow, and "Custer's youngest aide" led the van.

The trail of Soldier Fox was quickly struck by the keen Indian trail-hunters.

They followed it rapidly, but all were on the alert and suspicious of an ambush.

Jack told Curley something of his life, and his escape from capture by Sitting Bull and Rain-in-the-Face that morning as they rode along.

Then Curley said:

"We know white boy scout's father long time ago. He called Big-hunter. He one time save Curley from the stake. Sioux captured Curley. White boy's father great brave. Kill five Sioux. Cut Curley loose from stake. Curley be good friend to white boy for that."

"I am glad to find a friend at any time. I am sure you must be a good fellow, Curley, or my father would not have risked his life to save you," said Jack.

And he and the Indian shook hands.

"Ask Yellow Haired chief about Curley. Him tell you all about Crow scout, rejoined the Indian, proudly.

He was really one of the best scouts Gen. Custer ever had. Brave as a lion, cunning as a fox; and devoted to the general, he was a man to be relied upon always, and Yellowstone Jack could not have found a more valuable friend.

The camp of the bluecoats was soon left out of sight far behind the scouts.

They saw a fresh Indian "sign," but the trail of Soldier Fox was more recent. It crossed the trail of the hostiles.

At a certain point Yellowstone Jack drew rein and said, as he pointed at the trail, while a perplexed look appeared upon his countenance.

"Soldier Fox here turned from the course, which I believe would have led him to Sitting Bull's camp. Ah! he has gone toward the ranch of the white renegade."

"Zadok, the Sioux's friend?" asked Curley.

"The same."

"Good! Injun rather fight white outlaws for deserter than the Sioux."

"Shall we press on?"

"Wah! Yellow Haired chief say Soldier Fox must be taken," replied Curley, significantly.

And Jack comprehended the brave Indian was ready to brave any peril to carry out the order of Custer.

The youth and Curley rode on ahead of the main band of the scouts, and in a moment both disappeared in a depression of the plains.

Bang! The whip-like report of a rifle sounded from the gully almost immediately.

Gen. Custer's boy aide and the Indian scout re-appeared, while the report of the rifle vibrated on the air.

They came dashing back toward their comrades at full speed, and out of the gully behind them swarmed two score of red riders in war-paint and feathers.

A fierce and threatening outburst of savage yells sounded from the throats of the hostiles.

They had been in ambush in the gully, and Jack and the Crow scout had experienced a narrow escape. The premature or accidental discharge of one of their enemies' weapons had barely betrayed the presence of the Sioux in time.

"Quick! We must get under the shelter of the bank of the stream yonder before those fiends swoop down upon us, or lose our scalps!"

The scouts wheeled their horses and dashed for a water-course with steep banks, which they had but recently passed.

The Sioux pursued, and the charge was an appalling spectacle—one calculated to inspire terror into any heart.

Straight toward the little band of hastily retreating scouts rode the bloodthirsty Sioux warriors, and they were led by a noted chief—Crazy Horse.

The red fiends crouched over their ponies' necks, and yelled with shrill intonations that were mingled with the incessant cracking of their rifles.

Bullets sung through the air, slapping into the earth about the fleeing scouts like a shower of leaden hail.

But the band of Curley and Custer's boy aide reached the water-course ahead of the enemy.

Dismounting, they secured their animals under the bank of the stream, and leveled their rifles over at the Sioux.

Curley and Jack both knew that everything depended upon repulsing the first wild, desperate charge of the hostiles.

The Sioux came thundering on.

"Fire!" yelled Jack, and then Custer's gallant scouts began a battle for their lives against desperate odds.

CHAPTER III.

AT THE RENEGADE'S RANCH.

The first volley from the weapons of Custer's scouts was well-aimed and destructive.

More than one yelling warrior was unhorsed, and their affrighted ponies went galloping back among the ranks in the rear, occasioning considerable confusion.

But still the Sioux came on.

A second and a third volley was discharged from the repeating rifles of the scouts.

At short range terrible execution was done.

The hostiles could not withstand the destructive fire.

The storm of bullets carried death in its train.

The Sioux began to waver. Then they wheeled their horses and dashed away swiftly, getting out of range of the concealed marksmen.

But the situation of the heroic little band was still extremely perilous.

"We can't leave our position, and if they don't attack us again before night, the Sioux will be sure to come down on us when darkness comes," said the boy aide.

"Wah! White boy says true, and hoss soldiers can't know we are in a fight. Too far from camp for them to hear firing," replied Curley.

"Must we wait here to be massacred by the red fiends when night comes and we cannot see to beat them off?"

"If one of us could slip away and carry news to the hoss soldiers, Yellow Hair would send us help."

"Yes. But the Sioux are watching us closely. I fear what you say is impossible."

Jack and the Crow scout were standing close to the water's edge.

Suddenly a human head appeared above the water near them. They saw the face of a white man.

The rifles of the scouts were instantly leveled at the apparition from the water.

But the man they had discovered cried out at once:

"I am a friend, and I mean to serve you!"

"The lone scout!"

"The mysterious man of the plains!" exclaimed Jack and the Crow in unison.

"The same," replied the stranger, in a calm, stern voice, while the scouts lowered their rifles.

In a moment he gained the bank and stood before the scouts, shaking the water from his garments, while all regarded him with intense curiosity.

Well worthy of more than passing notice was he who acknowledged the soubriquet of "the lone scout."

He was more than six feet tall, and of giant frame.

He was clad from head to foot in buckskin. Indian moccasins encased his feet, and upon his well-poised head he wore a skull-cap of deer skin, adorned with a single straight black feather.

His hair, white as the driven snow, fell in long, graceful waves upon his broad shoulders, and his beard of the same spotless color was full and luxuriant, covering his face almost to the eyes, which were large, dark and luminous.

He carried a long rifle, and in his leather belt there was a brace of revolvers, a cartridge case, and a singular-looking long two-edged knife, with a sword-like hilt.

"Friends," said the lone scout, impressively, "your words have told that I am not unknown to you, at least by reputation, and so you must be aware that I am the friend of all honest men and the deadly foe of the hostile redskins and the white renegades of the border. I understand your situation, and I know where Gen. Custer is. Going as I have come—swimming under water—I will reach a point of the stream to the south beyond the sight of the foe, and then strike for the camp of the troops to bring you help."

Without waiting to hear the thanks which the joyfully surprised scouts meant to utter, the stranger re-entered the

stream, sank below the surface, and floated down with the current.

"I wish I knew who that strange man really is. But he has himself told almost all that any one knows about him. For years he has been known only as the lone scout, and it seems to be his mission to warn and protect deserving whites. The Sioux dread him, and so do the white outlaws. He has surrounded himself with mystery, and no man knows his real name or his history," said Jack.

Curley assented, and pointing at the opposite bank, he said:

"We must watch that side of the stream as well as this. We think Sioux will find stream and come at us from the rear."

Half an hour elapsed, and the besieged scouts were rejoiced to observe that nothing occurred to indicate that the lone scout had been discovered by the enemy.

Ere long, however, the Sioux were discovered on the southern bank of the stream.

The scouts opened fire at once, and in a short time the enemy was once more repulsed. After that they drew off.

But Crazy Horse, the leader of the hostile war party, shook his tomahawk defiantly at the scouts as he rode away, and shouted tauntingly:

"Sioux have soldier Injuns and white boy in trap! When night come take all 'um scalp. Wah! Yellow Hair never see 'um scouts alive again."

The friendly Indians under Curley sent up defiant yells as several shots were fired at the boastful Sioux.

The time wore on slowly after that, and the besieged were alert and watchful. But the Sioux had received a lesson. They were content to wait for the night to come, and they did not make another attack.

Sufficient time had elapsed for the lone scout to reach the camp of Gen. Custer before night fell.

Suddenly Curley uttered a glad shout.

"The hoss soldiers are coming!" he said, and following with their glances the direction in which he pointed, all saw a long line of dark moving objects far to the south.

The Sioux had already discovered the troopers, and the red fiends were seen to hastily mount and ride away to the westward.

Very soon Gen. Custer and his entire command, some eight hundred men, came up, and with the troopers rode the lone scout. He had, of course, reached Custer's camp in safety, and told the commander of the peril of his scouts. It seemed futile to pursue the Sioux then.

The general decided to push on toward the ranch of Zadok, the renegade, and, of course, all hope of capturing the half-breed deserter was given up.

The well-marked Sioux trail, which Sitting Bull evidently counted upon the troops following, until they reached the place where they meant to ambush them, was abandoned.

With Jack and Curley ahead with the Indian scout, the force pressed on. But night had fallen when they reached the ranch of the renegade, only to find it deserted.

The Indian scouts had picked up the trail of Soldier Fox all along the route to the renegade's ranch, so it was clear to Gen. Custer that the deserter had warned Zadok.

The command decided to go into camp for the night at the renegade's ranch.

But just as the troopers were dismounting a band of hostiles were discovered at the edge of a belt of timber in the west.

Instantly with all save a hundred men, who were left to guard the pack mules of the force, and protect Ethel Readon, the daughter of the murdered paymaster, at the ranch, Gen. Custer set out after the hostiles.

Yellowstone Jack was ordered to remain with the force left at the ranch. And the boy saw a moment after the main

force of the troops had galloped away that the lone scout had remained behind.

The boy noted that the man of mystery was regarding Ethel Readon with covert intentness, and the expression of his face told he was experiencing some powerful emotion.

The party left at the ranch had retired within the stockade, and some little time had elapsed when the sounds of combat reached them; and they saw Custer charge the hostiles and drive them into the timber.

"I fear the troopers will be drawn into an ambush!" said the lone scout to Jack, as the soldiers disappeared in the timber pursuing the Sioux.

A moment later a trooper came rushing from the rear wall of the stockade.

"The Sioux! The Sioux! A large band is dashing down toward the ranch from the north!" he cried.

A terrible chorus of savage yells proclaimed the truth of the trooper's announcement. The doors of the stockade were quickly closed and secured. The troopers sprang to the loopholes to repel the impending attack.

Already the darkness of night was descending upon the scene, and objects were only to be indistinctly seen at any distance.

As the redskins from the north came charging upon the ranch, a terrible explosion occurred in the ranch house, and in a few moments the building was wrapped in flames.

The fire spread to the walls of the stockade, while the enemy circled about them and discharged heavy volleys of rifle shots at the troopers.

The latter made a gallant fight. Every loop-hole was manned, and the volleys of the foe were returned.

But suddenly a small, well-concealed door in the stockade was thrown open, and through it dashed the murderous Sioux, like a band of wolves thirsting for blood.

At the head of the hostiles was a tall, heavily bearded white man.

"Zadok, the renegade!" cried Jack, as he beheld the ruffian.

"My father's murderer!" screamed Ethel, staring at the wretch with eyes dilating with horror and recognition.

Gen. Custer's young aide and the lone scout whisked Ethel into a corner of the burning stockade, and placed themselves before her, determined to protect her to the last.

"Kill—kill all but the gal, braves! Remember I have marked her as my prize!" yelled Zadok.

And a score of painted demons came charging at the boy prairie courier and the lone scout.

CHAPTER IV.

THE BATTLE AT THE RENEGADE'S RANCH.

Ethel Readon, the daughter of the murdered government paymaster, uttered a despairing cry as the bloodthirsty Sioux, led by Barnabas Zadok, the renegade, whom she had instantly recognized as the assassin of her father, charged toward the corner of the stockade surrounding the burning ranch of the outlaw.

But Yellowstone Jack, Gen. Custer's boy aide, and the mysterious borderman known only as the lone scout, who had placed themselves before the imperiled girl to defend her to the last, stood firm.

The Boy Prairie Courier and the strange, unknown wanderer of the far West clutched their deadly repeating rifles and leveled them at the painted demons who were urged on by the villainous white renegade.

"Save me from that man, whose hands are red with the

blood of my murdered father! Save me from the fate, far worse than death, with which he threatens me!" breathed Ethel, fervently, thrillingly.

She crouched in the corner of the stockade, white-faced and terrified. Her hands were clasped, and she made a wild gesture of appeal.

At that moment of appalling danger, though the young girl had been heroine enough to make the journey from Fort Lincoln into the perilous region of the hostiles to identify the suspected assassin of her sire, womanly terrors, which she could not allay, assailed her.

And the horror of all that wild scene in the land of the Sioux, coupled with the elements of intense dramatic action, stamped itself upon her mind never to be effaced while life lasted. The red glare of the conflagration shot into the darkening sky, dispelling the falling shadows of the fast-approaching night.

The flames surged around the ranch-house in lurid billows, a sea of flame, tempest-tossed and wind-driven.

The roar and crack of the devastating fire sounded as an undertone to the sounds of mad strife—the blood-curdling yells of the Sioux, the shouts of Custer's men, and the detonation of firearms.

"We will battle to the last to protect you!" said Yellowstone Jack, in answer to Ethel's despairing appeal.

The point in the stockade where Barnabas Zadok and the Sioux had so suddenly made their entrance through the hidden door was made some little distance from the position occupied by Ethel Readon and her two defenders at that critical moment.

And the renegade and his Sioux allies were compelled to charge across the ranch yard in order to reach the fair young girl whom Zadok had marked for a victim.

Instantly the repeating weapons in the hands of Yellowstone Jack and the lone scout began to explode.

More than one yelling red fiend fell in that charge under the bullets from the rifles of the two brave whites.

But as if to verify the adage that "Satan cares for his own," Barnabas Zadok, like one who bore a charmed life pressed on unscathed by the leaden death missiles.

Meantime, all the little force of Gen. Custer's brave troopers who had remained at the stockade were fighting with the utmost heroism.

And all were occupied at the other side of the stockade.

The charge of the Sioux had been so sudden, their entrance through the hidden door so unexpected, that Ethel Readon, Yellowstone Jack, and the Lone Scout were cut off from the heroic followers of Custer.

Suddenly the brave prairie lad uttered a sharp cry, and clapping his hands to his head, he reeled back and fell heavily at the feet of the young girl he had sought to save.

The succeeding moment the redskins closed in upon the Lone Scout, who, with rifle empty, stood as a gigantic living barrier between the paymaster's daughter and her deadly foes.

Swinging his heavy rifle as a club, the Lone Scout made a fight for life, such as had seldom been witnessed even in that wild land of deadly frays and murderous combats between men of the rival races.

Yellowstone Jack lay motionless as the dead between the lone scout and Ethel.

And the young girl crouched beside the fallen lad, watching the red life-tide which trickled down his forehead and stained his lividly white face.

She was dumb with horror. Her brain seemed to reel. The wild, hideously painted faces of the human wolves, who sought to drag the lone scout down, seemed to her to dance together and blend in a confused mass. But through all these mo-

ments of despair and terror, which seemed to her like ages, she grasped a small revolver, which Gen. Custer had given her when she left Fort Lincoln.

The contents of the loaded weapon she reserved for the final crisis. She meant to hold off Zadok's red fiends until but one shot was left, and then turn the weapon upon herself.

And she was aware of a strange and terrible sort of exultation at the thought that the man she feared more than death, would not capture her alive. Suddenly, however, her vision cleared. She saw a huge Sioux warrior bound forward and stoop beside Yellowstone Jack. A long, glittering-knife flashed in the great bronze hand of the savage above the head of the fallen lad.

The deadly weapon of the Sioux described a circle in the air, and the redskin gathered Jack's clustering hair in his left hand.

A strange, awful, fiendish, long-drawn yell, like the scream of a lost soul, pealed from the lips of the Sioux.

He uttered the "scalp hello" of his tribe, and Ethel Readon, the border girl, knew the painted miscreant meant to scalp Yellowstone Jack.

Like a flash she leveled her little revolver at the redskin, and as the blade of the glittering scalping-knife was descending upon Jack's skull she pressed the trigger.

The scalp hello was changed to a death yell, and the savage dropped the great knife from his nerveless hand and fell headlong to the earth with a bullet in his brain.

At the same time, like some noble stag, hemmed in by wolves despite the desperate heroism of his resistance, overpowered by numbers, the lone scout was dragged down.

And the enraged Sioux would have slain and scalped the strange border wanderer, against whom they had many an old grudge, but for the interposition of Zadok.

As the mysterious foe of the white outlaws and hostile redskins was dragged to the earth, his hunting shirt was torn open at the throat, exposing his broad chest.

Zadok was close upon the unknown nomad of the West, and a startled cry burst from the lips of the renegade as he saw upon the breast of the scout a great red scar, where, as if long since burned in the flesh, there appeared the letters "B. Z."

The Indians were about to stab the fallen scout to death. A dozen deadly blades were uplifted in dusky, revengeful hands.

"Hold—hold, I command you! That man must be taken alive! suddenly shouted Zadok, as he hurled his red allies aside.

"It is he—the man I branded with the branding iron used to mark my cattle in Colorado. He must have come to life after he was hurled over the ledge to the bottom of Red Gulch," added the renegade, under his breath.

"He is disguised, and it's clear he is still on my trail. Strange I never suspected that the lone scout was my nemesis. Ha! Has he revealed himself to the girl? Does she know who he really is? Ah! I comprehend now. He had more than a casual interest in the fate of Ethel Readon," he continued, mentally.

Meantime, Ethel had not seen an Indian, who, lasso in hand, was creeping up along the wall of the stockade toward her.

As the lone scout was dragged down, the brave girl began her last defense. As rapidly as she could press the trigger of her weapon, she discharged it.

But all at once a noose, cast by the red serpent who had crept up unseen, fell over her shoulders.

The lasso was drawn tight before she could throw off the coil, and she was dragged down. A moment, and the fair young girl whom Yellowstone Jack and the lone scout had

battled desperately to save, was a bound captive, at the mercy of Zadok, the white renegade.

And the few bluecoats who had survived the conflict at the ranch were fleeing for their lives from the burning stockade, closely pursued by the yelling and exultant hostiles.

The fugitives took the course in which Custer and the main force of the troops had been drawn off by Sitting Bull.

The lone scout was bound, hands behind his back, at the order of Zadok. Then a discovery was made which enraged the renegade and his allies. One of the Sioux who had meant to take the scalp of Yellowstone Jack, which his brother warrior had failed to secure, cried out:

"White boy gone! Wah! he no dead!"

It was so. In the confusion attending the capture of Ethel and the lone scout, General Custer's boy aide had escaped.

CHAPTER V.

THE RETURN OF GEN. CUSTER.

Barnabas Zadok and the redskins who had been directly concerned in the capture of Ethel Readon and the lone scout hurried away with their prisoners in the direction whence they had come.

In a few moments the burning ranch was seemingly deserted by the living, and beyond the area illuminated by the conflagration, the night was closing down.

Presently the head and shoulders of a human figure appeared above the level of the low curb of an old well at the side of the yard furthest from the ranch-house.

A pair of bright young eyes cast searching glances hither and yon in all directions until their owner had assured himself there were no redskins in sight.

Then Yellowstone Jack, for he it was, drew his lithe and active form fully up out of the well, and leaped lightly over the curb.

The lad's face was yet stained with blood, but he had bound a handkerchief around the wound he had received.

It was only a scalp wound—the bullet had grazed the lad's skull and the shock had sufficed to fell him like one dead.

He had regained his senses and had taken quick advantage of the chance to elude his foes, which circumstances presented at the moment of his resuscitation.

The old well which he had gained undetected had proved a secure hiding place. Through the cracks in the curb which screened him from the sight of the hostiles, he had watched them.

And with what feeling of regret and intense solicitude for them had he witnessed the capture of Ethel Readon and the lone scout.

The lad had observed Barnabas Zadok when the latter saw the brand upon the breast of the lone scout. But although the boy had not obtained a view of the cruel mark with which the renegade admitted he had branded the scout for life, Jack saw enough to assure him that Barnabas Zadok must have made some discovery which caused him to spare the life of the mysterious border man.

Yellowstone Jack marked the direction taken by the captors of the white girl and her defender.

"I'll track the renegade. Just wait until Curley, the Crow scout, and Gen. Custer come back. I'll get the general to let me have Curley and his friendly Indian scouts to rescue my friends," said Jack, resolutely.

He could still hear the yells of the division of the Sioux who had gone in hot pursuit of the fleeing soldiers.

Creeping along among the dead whose bodies were strewn

about the ranch yard, the lad secured his rifle, which he had dropped when he fell.

Hastily he reloaded the weapon, and then he crept toward a cattle-pen at a short distance from the stockade.

The lad had scarcely reached the shelter of the log building when the detonation of firearms in crashing and tremendous volleys resounded from the timber into which the Sioux in pursuit of the survivors of the fight at the ranch had followed the latter.

And while Jack looked anxiously in the direction indicated he saw the redskins burst out of the timber, running their ponies at full speed, and evidently in retreat.

After them came the troopers.

And Jack understood, as he saw Gen. Custer and Curley, the Crow scout, it must be the fugitive troopers had met the main force returning from the pursuit of Sitting Bull just in time.

The Sioux fled past the burning ranch and the cattle-pen, which sheltered the boy, without halting.

They were so closely pressed by the troopers that they were intent only upon eluding them.

The hostiles followed the trail of the white renegade and his band, and Jack did not doubt that the two bands headed for the stronghold of Sitting Bull.

Gen. Custer and the Crow scout, with the friendly Delawares, Shawnees, and Cherokees, led the van of the troopers.

Yellowstone Jack issued forth from the cattle-pen at once, and hastened to meet the bluecoats.

The Sioux had captured his fine black horse—one of Zadok's band who escorted the captives had ridden the lad's steed away.

Gen. Custer and the friendly Indian scouts drew rein as they discovered Jack, almost as he emerged from the cattle-pen.

The lad quickly ran up to them, and in a few words he reported the capture of Ethel Readon and the lone scout.

Pursuit was continued, and Jack was given the horse of one of the slain troopers. Jack rode at Gen. Custer's side, and the officer presently said:

"I think now the appearance of Sitting Bull was only a ruse to draw off the main force of my men from the ranch. The old rascal gave us a running fight in the woods, and then disappeared in the hills to the west."

Jack assented.

And then he said:

"Miss Readon recognized the renegade."

"As her father's murderer?" asked the general, quickly.

"Yes; she cried out, as soon as she saw the rascal, 'My father's murderer!'"

"Well, now that I am sure that Barnabas Zadok is the assassin, no effort shall be spared to capture him," replied the general.

"Me no understand why white renegade spare life of the lone scout. Sioux all hate that man. Sitting Bull have offer fifty blankets and a dozen ponies for him, dead or alive!" said Curly, the great Crow scout.

"It must be that Barnabas Zadok has some knowledge of the mystery of the life of that strange man, which influenced the rascal to spare the life of the latter, I think," observed the general.

"I think so, too. But the scout and Miss Readon must be rescued. Oh, general, we can't hope to save them by trying to run their captors down in this way. Let me have Curley and his friendly reds, and we'll outwit the Sioux and save the captives by some ruse," cried Jack, earnestly.

The general looked at Curley inquiringly.

"Wah! white boy have much good head. Curley help him if Yellow Haired chief say so. Maybe fool renegade and Sioux," was the guttural comment of the great Crow scout.

"Well, you have my consent. I shall go into camp and await

your return. But you must leave me some of your Indian scouts, and while you are on the trail I hope you may learn something of Sitting Bull's plans and the disposition of his forces," assented the general.

"We'll do our best," replied Jack, cheerfully.

"Wah! that so!" grunted Curley.

He pulled his horse up short as he spoke, and added at once:

"Me say better turn back now to ranch. Sioux think no more follow um now if do that. When night get darker Curley and band go after Sioux."

The wisdom of this advice was so clear to him that Gen. Custer immediately acted upon it.

As the entire force rode back to the burned ranch of the renegade, the general said to Jack:

"I am ready to take myself to task, for bringing Ethel to this dangerous region, even though it was that her father's assassin might be identified that I consented to do so. Poor girl, she is an orphan with no friends or relatives, so far as she knows; though her uncle, with whom she was a great favorite, may after all be living, though he has been mourned as dead."

"Indeed, what were the circumstances which make a doubt of the fate of Ethel Readon's uncle possible?" asked Jack, with interest.

"He disappeared under a cloud. He was accused of a great crime—the murder of a rival—a year subsequently news came that Jasper Readon—that was his name—had been lynched for cattle stealing in Colorado; but there was no positive proof of the truth of this report. Ethel has assured me she and her father have always believed Jasper Readon was entirely innocent of the murder which was fixed upon him," replied the general.

CHAPTER VI.

IN THE GREAT CAMP OF SITTING BULL.

The ride back to the burned ranch of the renegade did not consume much time, and as the troops proceeded on the return there, Curley the Crow scout said:

"Keen-eyed Sioux on the hill yonder, acting as scouts. Um go on, tell renegade hoss soldier have turned back."

Through the gathering gloom the general and Jack strained their visual organs trying to see the Sioux scouts.

But the effort was in vain. The sight of the whites was not as wonderfully powerful and far-reaching as that of the red man.

When the ranch, which was well-nigh consumed, was reached, the weary troopers picketed their horses, and sentinels were thrown out. The camp was quickly made, and upon the embers of the renegade's home the soldiers prepared the frugal meal.

Meantime, Curley chose three men from among his Indian scouts, and led them aside to where Yellowstone Jack sat alone, toasting his hardtack over the red coals.

"Um! Curley an' these three braves go with white boy after renegade," said the Crow scout.

"Then there will only be five of us on the dangerous trail!" exclaimed Jack. "Well, so much the better. The fewer there are of us, the more easily we can conceal our movements."

"Wah! That so! White boy speak Sioux talk?"

"Yes."

"So do Curley. So do um braves," and with a sweeping gesture, the scout indicated his three picked comrades.

"Now strip bodies of dead Sioux. Get five war dress," continued Curley.

"What are you getting at? You don't mean——"

"Wah! Curley mean to make disguise as Sioux of all our party."

"Ha! That's a great ruse! But mighty risky! I'm afraid my old Indian foster-mother—Wahnatach—will recognize me under any disguise if we should meet."

"Um! White boy steer clear of old medicine woman then."

"That's easy enough to say, Curley, but maybe I can't."

"Curley say, fool Sioux."

"Well, I'm in for it! Anything to rescue Ethel Readon," assented Jack. He pronounced the last word so fervently that the Crow scout looked at him keenly.

"Wah, maybe pretty white squaw have stolen heart of white boy chief," he said, smiling.

"Nonsense!" cried Jack, blushing.

The Indian scouts and Jack were ready for the dangerous trail they had resolved to take, very soon after that.

Each one was dressed in the garb of a dead Sioux, and all were skillfully painted in the hideous manner of the hostiles when on the war trail.

Mounted upon unshod ponies belonging to the friendly scouts, the devoted little band, carrying with them the best wishes of Gen. Custer and all the troopers, rode silently out of the camp under cover of the darkness.

But they did not immediately advance upon the trail of the hostiles, which the wonderful Crow scout possessed the faculty of following by the faint light of the moon and stars.

Curley was far too cunning and too deeply skilled in the subtle arts of Indian warfare for that.

The disguised scouts made a wide detour to the west and then struck eastward, so that they reached the trail of the hostiles coming from a direction from which the latter would not anticipate the appearance of a foe.

The night had grown somewhat lighter than it was when the party left Custer's camp, by the time they struck the trail of the hostiles.

After that they went forward boldly and swiftly.

The trail of Zadok's band was well marked, and it was clear the hostiles had been at no pains to seek to blind it.

The rescue party had well arranged their plans.

They all fully understood the part they had to play in one of the most desperate and daring stratagems ever attempted in the Far West.

The knowledge that their own lives as well as those of the captives were at stake, was enough to prompt them to play their parts with the utmost skill, and neglect no precaution which might contribute to their success.

For some hours the five scouts in the service of Gen. Custer had been silently but swiftly following the trail of the hostiles when all at once Curley and Yellowstone Jack, who rode side by side at the head of the party, drew rein.

Instantly the three disguised "friendlies" in their rear pulled up.

A tall, human figure had suddenly appeared upon the trail, directly in advance of the leaders of the rescue band.

The feathered head-dress proclaimed the apparition of a Sioux. He was evidently a scout thrown back upon the trail by Zadok to guard against a surprise from that direction.

The moonlight was particularly brilliant just then, as the clouds which had screened the face of the luminary had drifted away.

"Wah! Who comes?" cried the rear guard sentinel in the Sioux tongue.

"Brother of the league of the great war-chief of the Sioux—Sitting Bull. We come from the band of Cutnose," said Cur-

ley, in the deep and guttural tones of a Sioux, and speaking the language of that tribe perfectly.

"Good! A war party with prisoners is on ahead. They are bound for the camp of the great chief. If my brothers come from Cutnose they must be on the way to the camp of Sitting Bull, so they can do no better than to join the braves with the white Fire Water chief."

"We will do so," assented Curley.

And when the Sioux had asked if the newcomers had seen any white soldiers on the trail, and received the assurance that they had not, he volunteered to go on with the disguised band.

They proceeded at once.

And two hours subsequently they came up with Zadok's party. The latter had made one short halt only since they left the burned ranch.

Much to the satisfaction of the rescuers they were accepted by all the Sioux of the renegade band for what they pretended to be. Fortunately Cutnose's band, which was at Devil's Lake, was expected to join Sitting Bull. The cunning Crow scout's story coincided with the expectations of the Sioux perfectly.

Yellowstone Jack and his friends saw that Ethel Readon and the lone scout was closely guarded, and marched in the center of the Sioux war party.

It was evident that the rescuers could not hope to cut the captives out and get off with them while the band was on the march.

And they heard Zadok say that the party would not halt again until the camp of Sitting Bull was reached.

Yellowstone Jack's face fell as he heard that.

Curley rode close to him, and whispered:

"We must go on. We are not old women to turn back now."

"Never! We will go right into the stronghold of old Sitting Bull with Zadok's band, if we must," declared Jack, bravely.

The march was continued. Just at dawn Zadok drew rein on a wooded hill. All the band halted.

"We are almost there. Yonder is the great camp of Sitting Bull," said Zadok, pointing.

Jack and the disguised friendly scouts looked down in astonishment at a great Indian camp hidden in the hills. They were surprised, because they had never even suspected that Sitting Bull had assembled such a tremendous force. They saw there were thousands and thousands of red warriors in the camp.

"God help Custer if he is ambushed by that mighty Indian army!" muttered Jack.

The Sioux led the way down into the great camp.

The renegade and his band were warmly greeted. Sitting Bull was there. He had ridden rapidly, by a direct route, when he fled from Custer. The disguised scouts were fairly in the hostile camp, when, as they rode along between a long line of tepees, a hideous old hag suddenly rushed out of one of the wigwams.

"Wahnatach, my Indian foster-mother," said Jack to Curley, in a whisper. The next moment the medicine woman seized the lad's bridle rein, as she screamed, in the Sioux tongue:

"I know you. You make believe Sioux. Ho! Sitting Bull! Here is the runaway white boy who fled to betray your plans to the Yellow-Haired chief!"

CHAPTER VII.

THE BOY PRAIRIE COURIER A CAPTIVE.

The boy courier instantly recognized the old Sioux hag who seized his bridle rein.

She was Wahnatach, the medicine woman, and the lad's foster-mother.

Jack's bright eyes flashed around in every direction.

He was seeking for some avenue of escape, but the outlook appeared entirely hopeless.

It will be remembered he was in the midst of the great camp of the hostiles when Sitting Bull had assembled to ambush the gallant Custer.

Before, behind, and on all sides of the boy scout and his disguised comrades, Curley, the Crow scout, and his three "friendlyes," the painted warriors of the hostile camp were thronging.

The wigwams on every side had been vacated upon the arrival of the band of Sioux with whom Gen. Custer's youngest aide and his companions had so daringly ventured to enter the camp.

All hands had turned out to welcome the returning band which Curley and his party had joined.

The face of Yellowstone Jack paled.

He looked covertly at Curley.

But the face of the latter told him nothing.

The old medicine woman clung to Jack's bridle rein, and screamed again in the Sioux tongue:

"Yes, this is Yellowstone Jack! The white snake who ran away to join the Yellow-Haired chief!"

The Sioux who heard the old woman's startling denunciation exhibited great excitement and surprise.

The boy saw the warriors closing in around him closer and closer.

For one brief moment he thought of resorting to a desperate dash to escape.

But a second thought convinced him of the utter folly of such an attempt.

Surely he could not well hope to begin his flight before a hundred bullets from the weapons of the hostiles would pursue him.

It was one of those epochs which come in the career of all men who lead adventurous lives, when stratagem, coolness, and nerve alone can be relied on.

The boy's experiences had made him as shrewd and crafty as the red men, whom he must deceive or perish.

He beheld Sitting Bull himself making his way toward him from the great painted wigwam where he dwelt.

Then the idea of a ruse, which might serve, he thought, to at least delay his fate, flashed upon his mind.

He cried out at once:

"Ho, Wahnatach! You're wrong. I did not run away to join Custer as a real friend."

"The boy speaks with a crooked tongue. His blood is all white. He has forgotten that he has slept in the wigwams of the red men, and eaten at their campfires when he was too young to take the warpath. But now all his white blood cries out against the Sioux. Wahnatach is a great medicine woman. She reads the white boy warrior. He is a traitor."

The medicine woman addressed her words to Sitting Bull as he pushed his way through the circle of painted warriors about the boy aide of Gen. Custer.

"Ugh! It must be true, for the braves who were in the fight at the ranch of the fire-water chief saw the white boy with the pale-faces there, and then he wore not the dress of the Sioux, and he fought against them," said the great Indian chief, sternly.

"That's true, chief. But let me explain. Where is Howlolah, the man who runs in the night?"

Yellowstone Jack had seen the war chief whom he named fall in the fight at the ranch of Barnabas Zadok, where Ethel Readon and the mysterious lone scout had been captured.

"What would the white boy say of Howlolah?"

"Ask him if Yellowstone Jack was not sent by him to the

horse soldiers. Ask the man who runs in the night this, and he will say he sent me to act as a spy in Custer's camp."

"Wah! Can this be?" exclaimed Sitting Bull.

"No, I don't believe it! The spy has a serpent tongue!" cried the old medicine woman.

But Jack knew circumstances favored his story, and might lend it the semblance of possible truth.

Since the dead could not be called to testify against him, he felt that a reasonable doubt as to his guilt might be created in the mind of Sitting Bull.

The truth was that some time previous to his flight to join Sitting Bull's enemy, Gen. Custer, the lad had overheard Howlolah propose that he—Jack—should be sent to spy upon the advancing forces of the great paleface.

It was the timely recollection of this that caused the boy to adopt the desperate ruse he had now undertaken, and which seemed to offer the only possible chance for the salvation.

"If the white boy has spoken with a straight tongue, let him tell the chief why he fought against the red men at the ranch of Zadok, the fire-water chief. That was not the act of a friend—it was the evidence of enmity," replied the astute and crafty Indian chief.

"Ha! The great Sitting Bull does not see far. Has something made the chief blind to the fact that the white boy was in the power of Custer's men? They would have slain him if they suspected he was a spy, and that suspicion must have come to them if he had not fought. He made a show of fighting his red friends to save himself."

From the faces of the red warriors all about him, as well as from the expression upon the countenance of Sitting Bull, Jack read the most welcome intelligence that his clever and unexpected defense had made some impression in his favor.

"We shall see!" said Sitting Bull, grimly.

Then to the leader of the Sioux war party, with whom the white boy scout and the other members of Curley's band had entered the Sioux camp:

"Where did you fall in with this boy and the four strange braves I see with you?"

The chief addressed explained.

And Sitting Bull, looking somewhat perplexed, said:

"Let the white boy be conducted to the prison lodge and there be closely guarded until we learn more."

Just then Zadok, the renegade, with a dozen redskins, pressed forward with the lone scout and Ethel Readon.

"Chief, we have here two prisoners. The gal belongs to me. But the old foe of the Sioux—the lone scout—I give to Sitting Bull. Many a brave of your tribe has fallen under the bullets of the lone white slayer, and I know that the red men thirst for vengeance upon him."

A chorus of fierce yells greeted this speech.

The red fiends crowded about the lone scout.

They brandished their weapons threateningly, and no doubt the mysterious man of the plains would have met his death at the hands of his red enemies, then and there, but for the stern interposition of Sitting Bull, whose will was the law of his hostile tribe.

"Hold!" he cried, stripping off the scarlet blanket which he wore drooping from his broad shoulder. It is not fitting that the dreaded white hunter, who has brought grief and wailing to many a Sioux lodge in days gone by, should die any easy death."

With those words he cast the red blanket over the head of the mysterious scout, who had fought at the side of Yellowstone Jack, and so heroically sought to save Ethel Readon."

The Sioux yelled in delight as they witnessed the terribly significant action of Sitting Bull.

And the white boy scout shuddered from head to foot, for

he knew the casting of the chief's blanket over the head of the prisoner meant that he was reserved for the torture stake.

Sitting Bull and Barnabas Zadok, the white renegade, exchanged some words in an undertone, and then the lone scout and Ethel Readon were separated and led away to different lodges.

And Yellowstone Jack knew they would be watched by a vigilant guard.

Jack was led to the prison lodge.

And having bound his hands behind his back to the center pole of the lodge, his Indian jailers left him.

"Well, this is hard luck, and I'm afraid the future will be even worse for me. But the Sioux don't seem to suspect anything wrong with Curley and his three friendlies, and as long as they are in Sitting Bull's camp free from suspicion, I will not despair."

In this wise Jack reflected.

He knew that Curley would risk his life to accomplish his rescue.

And he thought it most fortunate that Cutnose and his band were not then in the camp.

Cutnose's band was recruited from the southern Sioux, and Sitting Bull and the main force of the hostiles were northern Indians.

It was but natural that all the members of the former band, who had but recently come north, should not be personally known to the Sioux chief and his immediate followers.

As Yellowstone Jack was led away to the prison lodge he caught the swift glance of Curley.

Something in the dark, keenly flashing orbs of the cunning chief of Gen. Custer's friendly Indian scouts caused the boy to feel that his red friend meant to convey to him a silent token of encouragement.

The youthful scout did not count upon deliverance through the efforts of Gen. Custer.

On the contrary, he believed the general could not help him, and that he could not find the hostile camp until the great ambush which Sitting Bull was arranging for him was complete.

There was an awful fear for the safety of Gen. Custer and his devoted little army in the heart of the great officer's youngest aide.

CHAPTER VIII.

A MYSTERIOUS ESCAPE.

Ethel Readon was a brave Western girl.

But great as was her courage it gave way before the assault of untoward circumstances, which had consigned her to the power of Barnabas Zadok, the white renegade.

The horror of her situation was materially intensified by the knowledge of the fact that the arch-villain who had led her into captivity among the bloodthirsty Sioux was the assassin of her own father.

She scarcely dared reflect upon what might be in store for her.

But on the way to the great hidden encampment of Sitting Bull and his vast army of hostiles the fair captive had overheard Barnabas Zadok in conversation with one of the Sioux warriors.

And from the talk of the renegade and the redskin the young girl had gleaned that Barnabas Zadok meant to compel her to become his wife.

She preferred death to such a fate.

She could conceive of nothing more abhorrent than an en-

forced union with the red-handed slayer of her beloved father. Alone in the lodge to which she was conducted, poor Ethel crouched upon the buffalo-robe covered earth and prayed for deliverance.

And, meanwhile, the mysterious lone scout, bound as Jack was in the lodge which had become his prison place, seemed to contemplate his fate grimly.

Anon his lips moved. But the words which passed them were mere mutterings.

One must have come very close to the strange wanderer of the wild Northwest, to have caught his utterances, which were as follows:

"Red Fawn heard all, and the beautiful Indian maid saw Sitting Bull throw the red blanket over my head. The daughter of the Sioux has a true heart. Since the day I saved her life in the flood of the Yellowstone I have secretly met her many times. It has been against my will, though. But the red maid has persisted in seeking me. She is the daughter of Sitting Bull, the great Sioux chief, and his favorite, but at our last meeting—which she brought about without my intending to see her again—she told me she would leave her father's wigwam and follow me to the end of the earth if I would only let her.

"Will the red maid's love now prove strong enough to cause her to brave discovery and the terrible anger of her father and all her tribe to aid me?"

The lone scout did not answer the question of such vital importance which he put to himself.

But anon he added:

"Poor Ethel! Heaven protect her, since I am powerless to do so.

"Does she suspect who I am? I think not. But I dare not reveal the truth yet. A mystery much be cleared up, a confession must be forced from the lips of the miscreant, Barnabas Zadok, before I can do so."

The hours wore on.

Meanwhile, Curley, the Crow scout, was in a fever of impatience and anxiety.

He dreaded the coming of Cutnose and his men. He knew the bloodthirsty chief, who had long ago vowed to take the life of Custer, might arrive at Sitting Bull's camp at any time.

And, of course, Cutnose would repudiate his claim that he and his three comrades had belonged to the war party of the latter.

Curley and the three disguised friendlies had a dangerous part to play in the hostile camp.

But they managed to hold a consultation among themselves, undetected or unnoticed.

"Brothers," said Curley, "the white boy, who is the friend of the great paleface general, must be saved. If we return without him, the yellow-haired chief will think we are old women and cowards. Then, too, I owe him a debt, which an Indian never forgets. He must not die!"

"Ugh! Ugh! Ugh!"

Each of the disguised friendly scouts uttered a guttural assent.

Then Curley went on, speaking in the language of the Crows which the others, from long intercourse with that tribe, had acquired the knowledge of.

"When night comes, the attempt must be made to get the white boy off and also the white squaw. Under cover of the darkness we must outwit those Sioux dogs."

More conversation ensued.

And Curley fully developed a daring project, which he had formed looking to the accomplishment of the proposed rescue.

Ominous preparations were at this time going forward in the great hostile encampment.

A green tree of small size had been cut down and a stake

was made from it, which was set up at the western edge of the camp near the wigwam or lodge of Sitting Bull.

Wahnatach, the hideous old medicine woman of the tribe, painted the stake black.

A number of the warriors employed themselves in gathering dry fuel, until a great heap of it had been collected and heaped up near the torture stake.

The old medicine woman then announced that everything was in readiness for the torture.

But there was some delay.

Sitting Bull hoped that Cutnose and his band would come in time to witness the burning of the lone scout at the stake.

As night was coming on once more the warriors became more and more impatient.

And they clamored for the prisoner whom Sitting Bull had himself doomed to the stake.

Finally the great chief said:

"Let the paleface be brought forth!"

And he led the way to the lodge in which the mysterious white captive had been placed.

Two braves stood on guard at the door.

"Lead out the paleface, and soon his screams and yells of torture shall make music in the ears of the Sioux," Sitting Bull said, addressing the guards.

One of them drew aside the flap of deerskins at the entrance of the lodge and looked in.

Then a wild, startled cry escaped his lips.

The others sprang with him into the lodge, and all saw it was empty.

And a great rent in the deerskin at the back of the lodge told how the scout had made his exit.

Sitting Bull picked up the thongs with which the white prisoner had been bound and announced that they had been severed by a keen-edged knife.

"There is a traitor among the Sioux. Ha! let me find him out and he shall take the place of the pale-faced hunter at the torture stake!" gritted the enraged chieftain.

"To the trail!" he added.

Already his braves had bounded through the great rent in the rear wall of the lodge.

And, like bloodhounds on the scent, bending low, with flashing eyes riveted upon the earth, they were seeking for the imprints of the white man's flying footsteps.

They found the trail.

A yell, fiendish, exultant in its wild and thrilling intonation, announced the discovery.

The trackers sped away.

And the news of the escape of the captive spread through the camp. Curley and his three comrades heard it.

And their hearts sank. If they had hoped to save Yellowstone Jack before, they now despaired of doing so.

"The escape of one prisoner will make the Sioux doubly watchful of the others. Look! They are setting extra guards about the lodge in which the white boy and the pale-faced squaw are imprisoned," said Curley.

The other disguised friendlies saw it was indeed as Curley said.

Ten braves, instead of two, as was formerly the case, were now stationed about each of the lodges which still contained a prisoner.

A period of great suspense ensued while the friendlies waited to learn what came of the pursuit of the lone scout.

Perhaps an hour had passed after the discovery of the escape of the lone scout when the braves who had taken his trail returned to the encampment.

And they reported they had lost the trail of the white fugitive at a water-course. Great was the disappointment of Sitting Bull.

But one of the returned trail-hunters took the Sioux chief aside and whispered some communication which seemed to surprise the latter.

Sitting Bull gave the warrior some instructions. Then he glided away, and with an expression of demoniac fury upon his painted face, the chief shouted:

"March Yellowstone Jack out of the prison lodge!"

CHAPTER IX.

YELLOWSTONE JACK AT THE STAKE.

"Hi! What is coming now? What message did the Sioux trail-followers bring Sitting Bull, that causes the chief to order the boy brought forth?" muttered Curley to himself.

He had been watching Sitting Bull closely, when the trail-hunter returned and made his whispered communication to the chief.

A moment later the guards at the prison lodge led Gen. Custer's boy spy out before the chief of the Sioux.

Curley and his three followers drew nearer the chief.

Jack glanced apprehensively at the face of Sitting Bull, and he felt a thrill of horror, as he saw the fiendish expression upon the painted face of the merciless Sioux.

Old Wahnatach, the medicine woman, came dancing to Sitting Bull's side, beating a war drum and shaking a guard's rattle.

"Wah! Ho!" she yelled. "The stake is painted! The fuel is ready! Wahnatach must have a prisoner for the stake! Wah, ho! Give me the pale-faced runaway!"

The hideous creature stretched forth her claw-like hands and seemed all eagerness to seize Jack and drag him away to the stake.

He shuddered in spite of himself.

"Peace, Wahnatach! Peace, aged prophetess of the Sioux! The stake shall have its victim anon," said Sitting Bull.

Then addressing Jack, he continued:

"The pale-faced boy has said he was sent by Howlolah, The-man-who-runs-in-the-night, to act as a spy in the camp of the Yellow-Haired chief?"

"Yes," replied the white boy courier, stoutly.

"And the pale-faced lad has declared that he is still the friend of the Sioux?"

"It is so," was Jack's answer.

But a terrible fear was in the boy's heart.

There was an air of suppressed exultation in the manner of Sitting Bull.

Jack suspected that the chief had a fearful purpose in questioning him again in this manner.

When Jack had last spoken, Sitting Bull shouted:

"Behold this man!"

Out from behind an adjacent lodge at that moment leaped a tall, painted Indian.

"Lost!" uttered Jack under his breath.

He recognized the warrior who so suddenly sprang into view. The redskin was Howlolah himself.

He had not been slain at Zadok's ranch, as Jack supposed. On the contrary, he had only been knocked down by a bullet which grazed his skull.

But, as he remained unconscious for a long time, his comrades had left him for dead.

The trail followers in pursuit of the lone scout had met Howlolah.

He was coming toward Sitting Bull's camp.

The supposed dead warrior was told of Jack's statement that Howlolah had sent him to Custer's camp.

Of course, the redskin repudiated this.

And it was arranged that he should remain outside the camp while the intelligence that he lied was carried to Sitting Bull.

The warrior who whispered to the great chief aside had communicated the intelligence that Howlolah yet lived and was near, and that he denied all Yellowstone Jack said.

Then Sitting Bull planned the terrible surprise for the white boy prisoner which has just been described.

The brave, whom Jack supposed to be dead, danced before the white boy and taunted him in every insulting manner.

The warriors yelled and shouted for the blood of Gen. Custer's youngest aide.

Sitting Bull raised his hand high above his head.

Silence fell.

"He will doom the pale-faced lad, and Curley cannot save him now," whispered the chief of Custer's Indian scouts to a comrade.

"Warriors," said Sitting Bull, "the pale-faced boy is a serpent, and out of the mouth of the brave, whom the traitor thought dead, we have heard the proof. Let him die at the stake!"

The Sioux waved his hand.

Old Wahnatach uttered a howl of delight.

And she leaped at the boy prisoner, crying out:

"Oh, you young snake! I'll beat you once more! I'll scratch your face and tear your hair—I'll——"

But the tirade of the savage old medicine woman ended in a howl of pain and rage.

She had barely advanced near enough to the white boy to enable him to do so when he dealt her a kick that doubled her up and hurled her to the ground at some distance.

The warriors who held Jack then dragged him to the painted stake.

And he was bound hand and foot.

Pale as death the doomed lad faced the howling red demons, who began to circle around him in the wild scalp dance, brandishing their weapons and seeking in every way to add to his terror and intimidate him to the utmost.

Old Wahnatach, whose vindictive hatred of the boy prompted her, gathered herself up and running forward snatched a blazing firebrand from the hand of a warrior who was about to apply it to the fuel which others had quickly heaped about the lad, and herself ignited the torture fire.

To deprive a redskin of the opportunity to participate in the dance about a prisoner doomed to the stake would be to inflict a severe punishment, for his savage nature most delights in witnessing the suffering of an enemy.

So it came about that all save two of the guards who had been placed about the lodge in which Ethel Readon was imprisoned deserted their posts to participate in the torture dance.

Yellowstone Jack saw the red flames leaping up all about him, and he closed his eyes to shut out the terrible sight.

His teeth were set and he was resolved to perish heroically.

He could no longer hope, and he commended his soul to the mercy of the all-wise Creator, of whose teachings he had learned something from the good missionaries who had come among the redskins in other days.

The mental suffering of Curley, the Crow scout, and the other disguised friends of the doomed boy were too terrible to be adequately described.

And they were powerless. Affairs had suddenly taken a turn which defeated the scheme Curley had half formed, looking to a desperate attempt at the rescue of Jack.

The Crow scout ground his teeth, and clinched his sinewy bronzed hands in impotent fury while he mentally vowed vengeance.

Hearing the wild uproar from about the torture fire, Ethel Readon crept to a hole in the deerskin of which the lodge she occupied was composed.

Looking through the small opening which was in the side of the lodge toward the stake, the young girl witnessed the frightful drama of savage vengeance which was being enacted there.

But while she stood enthralled by the horror of it all, though she did not wish to look longer, she saw a mounted Sioux come dashing into camp at full speed.

The red rider waved something in his hand.

And she heard him utter a shout in the Sioux language which she did not understand.

But she noted that Sitting Bull, with a startled cry, bounded away from the circle of red dancers, and rushed toward the approaching horseman.

The latter halted.

And he placed the object which he carried in the hand of Sitting Bull.

At the same time he seemed to speak exultingly.

Almost at the same moment Ethel caught the sound of a stealthy footstep in the lodge.

She turned quickly.

A low, alarmed exclamation escaped her lips, and she shrank away.

She beheld a tall Indian in full war paint and feathers standing just inside the door of the lodge.

The intruder seemed about to speak when a second Indian leaped through the door. He opened his lips as if to utter a yell, when the first-comer hurled himself upon him and caught him by the throat. The next moment the two men were engaged in a deadly struggle, and he who had entered first uttered in low tones:

"Fear not, I am the lone scout in disguise."

CHAPTER X.

HOW THE LONE SCOUT ESCAPED.

Ethel Readon recognized the tones of the strange man of mystery who was known throughout all the Northwest as the Lone Scout.

The surprise of the girl captive was intense.

But another and most welcome emotion had its inception in the thrilling revelation of the disguised white man.

His presence in the prison-lodge of the fair prisoner of the renegade was of itself sufficient to awaken in the mind of the despairing girl a new hope.

She thought he had come, inspired by some daring plan looking to her rescue.

And such was the case.

But the mystery of his own escape and how he came to reappear so soon in the camp of Sitting Bull must be explained, as those incidents have a direct bearing upon thrilling events yet to come.

While but two of the hostiles were acting as sentinels before the prison-lodge in which the lone scout had been confined, a slender, graceful red-skinned girl, whose face was really a bright and pretty one, stole out of the great lodge of the Sioux chief, Sitting Bull.

"Where would the Red Fawn, the princess of the Sioux, go?" asked an old and withered squaw who was seated at the door.

"To the stream, to the water-course to gather the sweet grass that grows beside it to weave a basket," replied Red Fawn, but her great black eyes did not meet the orbs of the old squaw.

And under her beaded and fancifully embroidered tunic the heart of the red girl was beating fast.

She felt the keen-edged scalping knife she had secreted in her bosom, and a daring, love-inspired determination which she had formed became more intense in her heart.

The old squaw said no more.

And the Sioux princess went swiftly away toward the water-course which ran near the prison-lodge in which the mysterious white hunter was a bound prisoner, awaiting a terrible death at the torture stake.

Red Fawn's eyes were fixed upon the prison-lodge.

"He is there, the great white brave, whose strong arm saved Red Fawn and brought her in safety out of the roaring, rushing flood, when but for him she would have perished."

Her lips parted. Her face was all alight with the glow of love.

"He shall not die! He who saved Red Fawn at the peril of his own life shall not perish at the stake. Red Fawn dare not plead for his life—she must save him secretly by her own unaided efforts—and she will!"

She reached the water-course.

There she remained for a few moments plucking the long, sweet grass, which the Sioux use in making their fancifully colored baskets.

Meanwhile she glanced hither and yon in every direction, seeking to make sure that no one was observing her movements.

Satisfied finally that she was not watched, she crept stealthily away through the long grass.

And she shaped her course directly toward the rear of the prison-lodge, which contained the white man to whom she had given her heart unsought.

She saw the hostiles of the great force which Sitting Bull had assembled secretly, with the avowed purpose of ambushing and exterminating Custer's army, moving about everywhere.

But no one seemed to have detected her stealthy movements.

With her blazing eyes fixed upon the lodge, which she had marked for her destination, she went on and on.

Still fortune favored the daring and heroic purpose of the devoted Indian maiden.

At last she reached the rear wall of the lodge.

Almost breathless with excitement now that the supreme moment, which might decide the fate of the Lone Scout and her own, for Sitting Bull in anger would not spare his own flesh and blood, she crouched close to the rear wall of the lodge for a moment.

She could hear the heavy footsteps of the guards at the door on the opposite side of the lodge as they paced to and fro.

And the guttural sounds of the two warriors' voices distinctly reached her.

They were talking about the burning of the Lone Scout at the stake.

And, as Red Fawn heard them exulting in anticipation of the terrible fate Sitting Bull had decreed for the Lone Scout, the Indian maid trembled.

But she was brave.

And presently she became as calm as the most stoical warrior of her tribe.

Then she drew forth the keen-edged scalping knife from her bosom, and without noise, cut an opening in the skin of dried and seasoned deerskin.

The faint sound reached the hearing of the white prisoner, whose senses had become as acute as those of the red men.

He started.

And he turned quickly in the direction from which the faint sound of the severed deerskin emanated.

Then he saw the glittering blade of a knife as it made its way through the lodge wall, until the opening was large

enough to admit of the passage through it of a human form. Instantly Red Fawn lifted the irregular flap she had cut and crept into the lodge, with one little bronzed hand clasped upon her lips, as a sign to enjoin silence.

The Lone Scout saw and recognized the Sioux princess, the daughter of the great Sitting Bull.

The hope that had come to him, that the Indian maiden would not let him perish without an attempt to save him, was realized.

Red Fawn reached the lone scout.

And as she cut the thongs of deerskin with which his Sioux captors had so securely bound him, she breathed in his ear:

"Crawl away, through the long grass, as silent and as swiftly as the serpent. Go, and may the great Manitou—the God of the red man and the white—guide your footsteps so that you may meet no foe."

"Red Fawn," he said, taking both her little trembling hands in his, "I go, and if I escape with my life, I shall know it is Red Fawn who gave it to me. Maiden, I thank thee with all my heart."

He was about to go. But she threw her arms about his neck detainingly, as she said:

"And you will love me after this?"

Gently he put her away from him, and a troubled look came upon his countenance.

"If we meet again we will talk more. Now good-by, my brave girl. Good-by, and may the Manitou watch over you."

The conversation had been carried on in the Sioux language.

And when he had spoken the last words we have recorded the lone scout glided through the opening which Red Fawn had made for his escape. The Indian girl followed.

Through the tall grass the escaping white man crawled until he reached the water-course and the forest.

Red Fawn made her way to the chief's lodge to watch and listen, dreading each moment lest sounds, to tell her that the escape of the white hunter had been discovered should reach her.

But she heard nothing until time enough had elapsed to enable the escaping man to place a safe distance between himself and the hostile camp.

But the mysterious man who had such a deep interest in the fate of the daughter of the murdered paymaster paused at length.

"I cannot go on. I cannot desert her. Ethel must be saved. But how? I cannot hope to bring Custer's men to the rescue. A surprise would be impossible. To lead the soldiers here would be to deliver them up to massacre. The reds outnumber them twenty to one," he reflected.

He was a man of resources, skilled in all the lore of the forest and the prairie, but the present circumstances presented obstacles in the way of his purpose, which cunning could not show him a way to surmount.

Chance served him in a manner which he had not thought of.

While he was still vainly reflecting, and seeking to originate some daring stratagem to outwit the redskins, he heard the soft tread of moccasined feet in the forest, where he had halted.

The sounds drew nearer. The approaching red man was coming from the direction of the renegade's deserted ranch and Custer's camp.

The lone scout glided behind a great tree as silently as a shadow. The Sioux came on. The concealed white man presently saw the feathers of his war bonnet above the bushes.

It seemed the Sioux would pass close by the great tree whose trunk afforded the lone scout concealment.

And so he did.

Red Fawn had given the lone scout her knife when they parted. The white man drew the long, keen blade, and making a sudden leap, buried it to the hilt between the shoulders in the back of the Sioux. The blade must have pierced his heart, for he fell dead.

Hastily the Lone Scout disguised himself in the war dress of the dead savage, and painted and stained his face with materials he found on the Sioux. Then he retraced his way to the camp of Sitting Bull, and entered it unquestioned.

CHAPTER XI.

A DARING RESCUE.

The irresistible power of the horrible fascination which the scene at the torture stake where Yellowstone Jack was bound exerted, had, as we have seen, drawn all save one Sioux guard away from the lodge in which Ethel Readon was a captive.

Barnabas Zadok was so confident that there was no escape for the beautiful young girl, whom he had marked for a victim, that he entertained no uneasiness on her account, and cheerfully entrusted her to the guardianship of the Sioux.

The lone scout sauntered near the lodge in which Ethel was imprisoned.

And as all the Sioux were giving their attention to the boy captive, and the preparations which were going forward looking to his torture, circumstances favored the daring stratagem the mysterious scout had planned. He meant to snatch the white girl from the power of the renegade—to carry her away beyond the camp of Sitting Bull.

And then, if it was in human power to accomplish the desperate undertaking, he meant to reach Gen. Custer's camp with the maiden.

It wrung his noble heart to think that he must abandon the boy hero, Yellowstone Jack, to the awful and untimely fate which his captors meant to mete out to him.

But he knew no effort of his could avail, either to save Gen. Custer's youngest aide or mitigate the severity of the dread fate to which his merciless red judges had condemned the devoted youth.

And so he went on and on until he came up unheeded close behind the Indian who remained at the entrance of Ethel's prison place.

The face of the solitary guardian was turned toward the torture stake. In spirit he was there, and he grumbled because he could not approach and take part in the savage drama of which Yellowstone Jack was the central figure.

So circumstances favored the Lone Scout.

Certainly the solitary guard could not anticipate any personal peril in the midst of the great hostile camp.

Closer and closer to the guard drew the lone scout.

And his muscular hand firmly clutched the handle of the great knife, whose long, keen blade had so recently been imbedded in the blood of one of the red demons.

A moment, and the final act, to open the way to the white girl captive, was consummated.

And with one tremendous blow the lone scout sent the deadly blade to the vital organ which pulsated in the breast of the red guard.

The latter fell.

And one deep, awful groan, and only one, escaped his stern lips, as a terrible quiver convulsed his muscles from head to foot.

The lone scout cast a blanket which lay at the door of the lodge over the slain redskin.

And then he crept into the lodge—into the presence of the fair prisoner, as a messenger of deliverance to her, at the moment when, in her despair, Ethel had abandoned all hope.

But a pair of glittering, evil eyes, in the head of a Sioux who chanced to appear at the door of an adjacent lodge, where he had entered to procure a rattle, to be used in the torture dance, a moment later looked forth at the lone scout as he threw the blanket over the form of the dead Indian.

A suspicion seemed to flash upon the mind of the Sioux.

He noted that through the blanket the outlines of a human form was visible.

The discoverer was a young warrior, anxious to distinguish himself and prove his cunning and prowess.

To give a false alarm would be to call down upon him the derision of the older warriors.

He was not sure there was anything wrong. He would first satisfy himself, and then—his flashing eyes and eager look told he would act decisively if there was real cause to do so.

He gained the form concealed by the blanket just as the figure of the disguised lone scout vanished within the prison lodge.

Instantly the Sioux grasped the blanket and threw it aside.

The dead body of the Sioux guard was fully revealed, and the discoverer knew there was a foe—a disguised enemy—in the camp—ay, inside the very lodge which sheltered the fair captive of the white renegade.

With visions of honors won, and a rich reward to be obtained from Barnabas Zadok, if he frustrated an attempt looking to the rescue of the white girl, the Sioux sprang into the prison lodge.

We have recorded how the warrior opened his lips to utter an alarm yell when he beheld the disguised rescuer.

And we have noted how the lone scout promptly hurled himself upon the redskin and clutched him by the throat.

The yell the Sioux meant to sound was not uttered, and the struggle which went on, while the rescuer told Ethel who he was, became a furious and deadly combat.

The lone scout knew he was battling, not only for his own life, but for the honor, perhaps the life of the daughter of the murdered paymaster.

The combat was as brief in its duration as it was fierce in character.

But the rescuer seemed endowed at that supreme moment with superhuman strength.

Finally he hurled the Sioux to the earth, planted his knee upon his herculean chest, and still retaining his clutch upon the redskin's throat with one hand, with the other used his terrible knife with fatal effect.

Then the lone scout sprang erect.

And panting with the exhaustion of the tremendous exertion he had put forth, he looked anxiously from the lodge.

What he saw reassured him. There was no one near, and he decided the Indian whom he had last slain was the only one of the Sioux who suspected him.

The scout turned to Ethel.

"Wait one moment," he said.

Then he stepped outside the lodge and quickly dragged the redskin, who lay without, through the portal, and he brought the Sioux's blanket inside with him.

Casting the blanket over the shoulder of the trembling girl, he continued:

"Follow me. I rely upon you being taken for a squaw, if our movements are noted from a distance. We must now lose no time in attempting to get clear of the encampment."

"Let us go at once," replied Ethel, trying to appear brave, and struggling against the emotions which made her weak and tremulous.

The lone scout led the way from the lodge, and closely fol-

lowed by Ethel he made his way toward the confines of the camp.

All went well.

They were not noticed.

Soon they reached the timber.

The lone scout drew a deep breath, and shouldering the rifle of one of the slain Indians, which he had brought with him from the lodge, he gave Ethel his hand, as he said encouragingly:

"Now for the camp of Gen. Custer. God grant we may reach the troopers in safety."

They went forward swiftly after that.

They had proceeded for some miles in the direction of the camp of Gen. Custer, when the lone scout made the discovery that a considerable band of Sioux were approaching.

The redskins were coming from the direction in which the fugitives were going.

And the lone scout presently announced to Ethel: "They are Cutnose's band!"

Almost as he spoke a yell rang out from an adjacent thicket, and a painted warrior sprang into view.

Instantly the lone scout knew he was one of the advance scouts of Cutnose's band, for when on the warpath the Indian always threw out scouts ahead.

Answering yells came from the main band of the hostiles, and the lone scout said as he plunged into a dense cover with the maiden:

"Our advance is cut off! There is but one hope left us, and that is to reach an old hiding place of mine in the hills!"

CHAPTER XII.

RESPITED AT THE STAKE.

Meanwhile, some startling and unexpected events, which were destined to exert a potent influence upon the fate of the boy prairie courier, had transpired in the great encampment of the hostiles.

The red, devastating flames of the torture fire which threatened soon to reach and consume the doomed lad at the stake were drawing very near Yellowstone Jack, when the Sioux rider, whom Ethel had seen dashing into the camp, appeared.

The red horseman continued to wave the object which the girl captive had seen in his hand until Sitting Bull, rushing to meet him, took it from his hand.

Ethel, being ignorant of the language of the Sioux, had not understood the shouts uttered by the courier, for such the rider really was.

He cried:

"A message from Cutnose! Stay the torture fire!"

It was a picture writing traced on bleached deerskin, which the Sioux horseman hastened to deliver to Sitting Bull.

Reading it the great Sioux chief gained the surprising and alarming intelligence that his youngest son, who had been with Cutnose's band, had been captured by Gen. Custer's scouts.

"Wah! The yellow-haired chief of the horse soldiers has my son! But I have his boy spy. I'll spare the runaway white boy now, for he may yet serve me as a hostage to exchange for my son!" said Sitting Bull.

Curley, the disguised Crow scout, in the service of Custer, had followed Sitting Bull when the chief ran to meet the Indian messenger.

It was with feelings of relief and thankfulness such as no pen can adequately depict that Curley heard the words of Sitting Bull.

He returned to the torture stake.

Sitting Bull arrived there in a moment.

And, leaping forward to the blazing circle which enveloped the great heap of fuel about Yellowstone Jack, he began to kick away the firebrands.

And he shouted:

"The paleface boy is respited. Yellow Hair has captured Long Knife, my son. The white boy may be exchanged for the young brave if we keep him alive. If we kill him the chief of the horse soldiers may slay Long Knife."

In a moment Sitting Bull reached Yellowstone Jack.

The boy was half suffocated by the smoke of the torture fire, but the flames had not as yet reached him.

With his hunting knife Sitting Bull severed the thongs with which the lad was bound to the stake, and led him away from the torture fire.

The brave lad could scarcely believe his deliverance was a reality.

But from the conversation among the Indians, which went on around him in excited tones, he gathered the explanation of how it came about that he was respited.

It seemed to Jack as if this was something more than a mere chance—that the hand of Providence was at work—that he was destined to live to serve Gen. Custer yet.

Yellowstone Jack was returned to the lodge, from which he had been removed to the torture stake, and though old Wahnatach, the medicine woman, howled in disapproval, the boy was not further molested then.

And Barnabas Zadok, disappointed at the respite of the boy, took his way to the lodge in which he believed his fair captive still to be a prisoner.

When he arrived at the door he noted, in surprise and alarm, that there was no one on guard at the portal.

Bounding into the lodge, the renegade instantly discovered the bodies of the two dead Indians.

And he saw, of course, that his fair prisoner was gone.

The rage and chagrin of the renegade was unbounded.

He darted out of the lodge and uttered the wild alarm yell which he had learned from his Sioux allies.

The redskins, hearing the alarm, came dashing toward the lodge from all parts of the encampment.

Sitting Bull chanced to be near.

And he was one of the first to reach the lodge.

There was wailing, and threats of vengeance were uttered over the bodies of the two redskins whom the lone scout had slain.

Then search was made for the trail of the white girl and her rescuers. The wonderful skill of the red trailers enabled them to find the trail of the lone scout and the maiden at the edge of the timber.

And ere long several of the warriors were tracking the fugitives with the sagacity and perseverance of bloodhounds on the scent.

Curley, Gen. Custer's Crow scout, was at the lodge from which Ethel had been rescued almost as soon as Sitting Bull. But he did not remain there.

On the contrary, he had no sooner learned that Ethel had been rescued than he hastened to join his disguised comrades.

"Come, my brothers. The white boy's life is safe for the present, and the white squaw has escaped. Let us creep out of the camp and away."

A few moments later, while all the Sioux were discussing the escape of the white girl, and looking for her trail, Curley and his devoted comrades crept out of the camp, secured their horses, which were picketed near, and rode silently away.

"We must reach the yellow-haired chief," said Curley.

"And warn him," replied one of the other friendlies who rode at Curley's side.

"Yes, the yellow-haired chief has no thought that Sitting Bull has assembled such a vast army, and even I did not suspect it. If Custer advances and is not warned in time, he will be drawn into an ambush."

"True; the pale-faced braves do not think Sitting Bull has more than a few hundred warriors with him, at the most."

"And the Yellow-Haired chief is burning to give battle. He thinks it will be an easy matter to defeat and scatter Sitting Bull's forces."

"Yes, and so far, Sitting Bull has conducted the campaign to make the yellow-haired chief think this."

"True. Sitting Bull has only allowed small bands of his warriors to show themselves, and those have promptly retreated at the advance of the troopers, as though they dared not stand a fight."

"It is all as my brother says—Sitting Bull is the great general of the Sioux. He will catch the Yellow-Haired chief and all his warriors in a trap if we fail to reach the soldiers with a warning."

After that the friendly Indian scouts rode on steadily for some time.

They were in a pass in the hills, when all at once, with a startled exclamation of warning, Curley drew rein and pointed to a ledge high above his head.

For an instant the keen-eyed followers of Custer's Crow scout caught a glimpse of an Indian—a Sioux scout.

The rifles of Curley and his comrades leaped to their shoulders.

At the same instant the hill-top spy of the hostiles disappeared silently.

The weapons of Custer's friendlies descended.

They looked into each other's bronzed faces in alarm.

Curley was the one to speak first.

"Forward! We must ride for our lives now, my brothers. The spy who was on the ledge will tell others that we are all riding toward Custer. We shall be cut off and called to account. Though the spy cannot know we are not Sioux, suspicion, once turned on us, we are lost," the Crow said, in his own language.

After that the friendly scouts did not spare their horses.

Urging the animals on at full speed, they were approaching the end of the defile, when suddenly the opening to the plains beyond was closed by a mounted band of full ten score Sioux warriors.

"Cutnose! The Lieutenant of Sitting Bull and his warriors. The Sioux chief knows me! I helped to guard him when he was a prisoner at Fort Lincoln," said Curley, recognizing the bloodthirsty Sioux who had long ago taken an oath to kill Custer.

The situation was one of awful peril. The unmasking of the disguised scouts meant the doom of Custer, for then, it seemed, there would be no one to warn him.

CHAPTER XIII.

CUSTER'S SCOUTS IN A RACE FOR LIFE.

The Crow scout in the service of Gen. Custer and his companions, the disguised friendlies, had made no discovery since they left the great camp of Sitting Bull to indicate that they had been missed or pursued.

And yet the Sioux were on their trail, and momentarily drawing near them, when they halted in the defile in the hills

at some distance east of the hostile camp, when they discovered Cutnose's band at the mouth of the pass.

A circumstance had transpired after they left the camp of Sitting Bull clandestinely to arouse the suspicions of the Sioux.

And almost immediately the confirmation of those suspicions came to the hostiles in a startling manner, and in a way Curley and his friends had not anticipated.

Soldier Fox, the half-breed deserter from the forces of Custer, who was in the service of Zadok, the white renegade, had executed the commission which Zadok had intrusted to him, and brought the Sioux down upon the bluecoats at the ranch of the renegade, where Yellowstone Jack, Ethel Readon, and the lone scout were captured, as we have seen.

The half-breed spy had later been dispatched southward to scout for reinforcements, which he had told Sitting Bull and the renegade Custer expected.

The crafty half-breed spy had, while in the camp of Custer, learned that Gen. Miles was also on the march with a considerable force of troopers, intending to form a junction with Custer in the Yellowstone country, before the campaign against the Sioux was actively opened.

Soldier Fox made a long scout.

And that fact accounted for his absence from the great camp of the hostiles during the occurrence of the thrilling incidents last recorded as taking place there.

But the half-breed spy was on his way to Sitting Bull's camp at the very time when Curley, the Crow, and his three disguised comrades were stealthily making their way from the great camp.

The half-breed was in the timber among the hills when his keen sense of hearing suddenly warned him that horsemen were approaching at no great distance.

The spy of the hostiles instantly drew rein, and leaping lightly from the back of the swift-footed pony, he placed his ear to the ground.

"Wah! One, two, three, four! Four riders," he muttered in a moment.

Then, while his beady black eyes gleamed cunningly, he led his pony into a dense thicket, secured the animal there, and immediately crept away.

The half-breed proceeded in the direction whence the sounds of an approach emanated.

He had no means of deciding in advance whether the approaching parties were hostiles or some of Custer's scouts.

But he meant to make sure.

He presently halted behind a great rock, noiselessly parted the bushes that grew beside it, and cautiously peered forward into the open beyond.

At that moment Curley and his three followers were near the great rock, and in full view.

The spy saw them.

And taking them for Sioux, he was about to make his presence known, when he obtained a nearer view of the face of Curley.

Now, of course, while with Custer, Soldier Fox had become very familiar with the appearance of the Crow scout, who was, however, generally unknown to the Sioux.

Something in the face of Custer's disguised scout immediately struck Soldier Fox as familiar.

He cunningly restrained the impulse to show himself, and, on the contrary, he waited for the Crow scout to approach near.

The circumstance favored the wish of the half-breed to obtain a nearer view of the scout.

The course of Curley and his comrades presently led them close by the hiding place of the spy.

And with his keen eyes rivetted upon the disguised face of

the faithful friendly, Soldier Fox presently made the thrilling discovery of his identity.

"Wah!" uttered the half-breed under his breath. "He is Curley, the Crow scout of the Yellow-Haired chief. Wah! Why is he painted and dressed as a Sioux, as are his comrades? I suspect they are Custer's scouts, too, and that they have been with Curley spying upon Sitting Bull."

The Crow and his three followers rode on.

And presently, while he remained undiscovered, Soldier Fox heard Curley say:

"We push on steadily now. We make Custer's camp at the ranch of renegade. Wah! We bring Yellow Hair great news. Though Yellowstone Jack told him the Sioux were massing, the great white chief does not suspect what an overwhelming force Sitting Bull has to hurl against him."

Soldier Fox remained in his place of concealment until the friendly scouts were out of sight.

Then the spy retraced his way.

He soon reached the thicket in which he had left his horse.

Mounting the animal he rode at full speed straight in the direction of the great Sioux encampment which Curley had so recently left.

Meantime Sitting Bull, Crazy Horse, Rain-in-the-Face, and Zadok, the renegade, were holding a consultation.

They were discussing the mysterious rescue of the girl captive, and considering the probability of the red trackers overtaking the maiden and her as yet unknown rescuer, when suddenly a warrior rushed up and exclaimed:

"Wah! The four strange Sioux are gone! The boy, who watched the ponies, saw them go away some time ago. They went slyly. Wild Wind suspects something wrong."

"Ah! This must be looked to. Those four braves were all strangers. And now I recall they were in the company of Yellowstone Jack, the white boy, when he joined the band with whom he came to camp," the chief cried.

"Ha! That is a suspicious circumstance which we should not have overlooked, chief," said Zadok.

"No. The Sioux were blind."

"We must pursue the strangers."

"Yes."

Sitting Bull rallied a force of a score or more of picked trail-hunters. They were instructed to mount the fleetest ponies in the tribe and run down and bring back the four strangers at all hazards.

In a few moments the picked band were ready to set out. But just then Soldier Fox rode into camp.

"Wah! I have news for the great chief!" he shouted to the red sentinel at the edge of the camp.

As they recognized him, he was allowed to pass without delay.

He rode up before the lodge of Sitting Bull.

There the great chief, Crazy Horse, Rain-in-the-Face and Zadok still stood.

"What is it, Soldier Fox?" cried Sitting Bull.

"Wah! Me see Curley, the Crow scout of Yellow Hair, dressed and painted like a Sioux, in company with three comrades, riding away from the Sioux camp."

"Ha! Then they were spies!" yelled Sitting Bull.

"And we have been duped!"

"The Crow has made the eyes of the Sioux blind, like those of old women," said Crazy Horse, in angry tones.

"But we will overtake them. Away, braves! Bring the false Sioux back or take their scalps!" said Sitting Bull to the warriors who were ready to take the trail.

"They must never reach Custer. Remember, chief, those men have been all through this camp. They have noted our strength. They have heard our talk," said Zadok.

"Yes, and they can tell the Yellow-Haired chief all, and they

will if they reach him," fiercely rejoined Sitting Bull, as he urged the pursuers away.

The picked band dashed out of camp.

They saw the well-marked trail of the mounted men they meant to overtake.

Flogging the ponies mercilessly, but grimly silent, with their bright eyes looking keenly ahead, they went on.

And so it came about that at the time when Curley and his followers discovered the band of Cutnose blocking the mouth of pass through the hills ahead of them, the Sioux from the hostile camp were close in their rear, but yet undiscovered.

"We must turn back, get out of the pass, and make a dash southward!" said Curley, when he had discovered the hostiles ahead.

It was the only chance.

They wheeled their ponies.

And, as they went clattering back along the defile, they heard the Sioux from whom they were retreating yelling savagely, and they caught the sound of swift pursuit.

The grim red scouts of Custer knew they were riding for their lives, with the chance of escape against them.

In silence they pressed on.

And they had just got clear of the pass, and entered the open valley which ran southward, when all at once, out of a fringe of timber, at a water-course not more than a hundred yards away, dashed the redskins from Sitting Bull's stronghold.

Crack! Crack! Crack! The friendly scouts discharged a deadly volley, and swept on like the wind, while the hostiles sought to intercept them.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE LONE SCOUT'S SECRET CAVE.

It was, of course, the same band of Cutnose's warriors who had discovered the lone scout and Ethel who had later pursued Curley and his comrades.

The fate of the brave rescuer of the daughter of the murdered paymaster and the maiden seemed trembling in the balance, with all the chances against them, when we left them.

"Yes," reiterated the lone scout, as he saw the large war party spreading out to cut off the further advance of himself and his girlish companion. "Our only hope is to reach my old hiding place in the hills."

They wheeled about and dashed away, hand in hand.

But they had not ran far when they came upon two Indian ponies, which their owners had left picketed, while they climbed a hillside to inspect the country. They mounted the ponies and rode swiftly southward.

"Ride for your life, girl!" admonished the mysterious white scout.

With the yells of the Sioux ringing in her ears, and striking terror to her heart, brave though she was, the border girl followed the daring man, who had evinced so deep an interest in her fate, and terribly imperiled himself in her behalf.

The Sioux rode at the utmost speed.

But Cutnose's band had made a long ride that day, and therefore their ponies were jaded and weary.

The ponies ridden by the lone scout and Ethel were, however, comparatively fresh, having so recently come from the camp, where they had been at pasture for some time.

This fact gave the white fugitives an advantage at the outset of the thrilling race, which they were not slow to improve to the utmost.

From time to time, as they thundered on, they glanced back anxiously.

It was with feelings of great joy that they observed they were maintaining and gradually increasing the lead of their red foes.

They saw the main body of the band give up the chase anon.

But some twelve braves, who were the best mounted members of the war party, clung to their trail obstinately.

"How far have we to ride to reach your hiding place?" asked Ethel anon, in tones of anxiety.

"Some ten miles. My secret cave is in the very heart of the wild hills."

"Oh, it is a cave, then?"

"Yes; and I have good reason to suppose no redskin of this age has ever discovered it, though I think it was once the home of some aboriginal race, who may, indeed, have dug it."

On and on in silence they went.

And finally the foremost of the determined twelve, who hung upon their trail like grim shadows of doom, was left behind.

He had been lost to sight for full half an hour, and all sounds of pursuit had died away in the distance, when the lone scout drew rein at a waterfall.

It was a beautiful and picturesque scene of wild, natural grandeur which presented itself to the sight of the fugitives.

They were at the side of a waterfall. There a hill stream of considerable size sent its water over the rocks in a sheet of spray with a fall of more than a hundred feet from a jutting ledge.

"Follow and fear not! There is a hidden pathway under the falls," said the lone scout.

Then to the amazement of the young girl he urged his horse into the torrent and disappeared.

She hesitated for a moment, and then she, too, rode into the blinding sheet of falling water, but in a moment she found herself on a ledge of rock close to the steep wall over which the water descended.

The falls fell as a limpid curtain between her and the outer wall, but the water did not strike her.

Through the mist and semi-gloom she saw the lone scout.

And he rode into an opening in the rocks, over which the water descended and vanished from her sight at once.

She followed again.

And presently she found herself in a large, dry and lofty-roofed cave.

The lone scout had already dismounted.

And he had ignited a torch of resinous wood.

When the bright flames burned brilliantly enough to dispel the gloom of the cavern, Ethel, glancing about curiously, at once discerned numerous evidences of previous occupancy.

There was a heap of resinous wood at one side of the cave, near it was a rude couch of leaves and balsamic boughs covered with bear-skins.

A rude fireplace full of blackened ashes was built against the wall, and there were some cooking utensils near it.

The lone scout assisted Ethel to dismount, but first he stuck the blazing torch in a crack of the rocky floor.

"Here I hope we may remain safely in hiding until the search which Cutnose's warriors will be sure to make for us is over," said the lone scout.

"It seems like a secure hiding place. Oh, I hope it may not be discovered! But what shall we do with the ponies? There is nothing for them to eat here," replied Ethel.

"You are wrong. This place has long been my winter quarters. In the rear of the cave, which has several subdivisions, I have a supply of provender left over from last season, and also dried venison, hardtack, and the like, which we can eat if our stay should be prolonged."

"If you will carry the torch I will lead the animals to the improvised stable."

"Certainly," said Ethel, becoming cheerful, under the inspiration of the lone scout's hopeful tone.

While the girl carried the torch, her companion took the ponies by the bits and led them to the rear of the main cave.

These two compartments, the one extending to the left, the other to the right, branched off from it.

Into the right cavern the mysterious friend of the imperiled girl led the horses.

The place was rudely fitted up to serve as a stable.

The scout secured the ponies.

Then he said:

"We will now go back to the main cave, and I must leave you for a time."

"Must you go?"

"Yes; I must scout about, and if any redskin should attempt to penetrate under the falls, I shall try to make the attempt fatal to him."

He pointed up at the wall, adding:

"I have here some extra weapons."

Ethel saw him reach up to a natural shelf of rock and take down a revolver. This he examined, and handed to her.

"Take this weapon," he said. "You will find it all ready for use, and if necessary do not hesitate to use it. But I trust there may be no need for you to do so."

She received the weapon from his hand.

And, as she did so, she saw beyond him, on the rocky wall, some strange, grotesque figures, rudely carved in relief.

"Those carvings were here when I first accidentally discovered the cave. I am satisfied they are the work of some ancient race, as they are entirely unlike any of the Indian carvings of this age," he explained, observing the direction of her glance.

A moment later he pressed her hand, saying:

"Try not to be alarmed. I shall soon return. But in the meantime be vigilant and watchful."

Then he stole away through the mouth of the cavern underneath the waterfall.

Left alone Ethel felt the dread and fear which for a young girl was but natural.

The torch continued to burn. Its fitful glare still illuminated the underground place.

And the uncertain light fell upon the grotesque figures carved upon the wall, producing a startling effect.

As she gazed upon them with a sort of fascination, it seemed to Ethel's excited imagination that they were all moving forward, as if to surround her.

She shuddered and crept nearer the mouth of the cave.

Perhaps an hour had elapsed after the departure of the lone scout, when Ethel became aware that stealthy footsteps were approaching along the pathway under the falls.

Gladly she thought:

"The lone scout is returning."

But the next moment with unspeakable terror she saw a hideous redskin peering in at her through the mouth of the cave.

CHAPTER XV.

HEMMED IN.

It was after part of the band of Cutnose had gone in pursuit of the lone scout and Ethel Readon that the main band discovered Curley and the friendlies.

The fusillade discharged by the latter at the Sioux from

Sitting Bull's camp, who sought to intercept the four scouts while Cutnose's band came yelling after them in the rear, was a deadly one.

Every shot told.

Four Sioux ponies dashed away riderless, and four red warriors were hurled to the ground, stained with their own life blood.

The rush of the Sioux was checked.

On and past them swept Custer's Indian scouts at mad speed. Of course, they were pursued.

Cutnose's band and Sitting Bull's trailers united.

And they pressed on in the chase with determination.

Curley and his men knew the red wolves behind would never leave their trail until Custer's camp was too near to make it safe for them to follow further.

Suddenly a shot from a long-range rifle struck one of the ponies ridden by one of the friendlies.

The animal fell with a broken leg.

A comrade took the dismounted man up behind him.

And the race continued, but again the long-range rifle in the hands of an expert Sioux marksman spoke.

Another pony fell.

As before, the rider of the unfortunate steed was taken up behind a comrade. Curley took the last dismounted scout on his own steed.

But now there were but two ponies to carry the four escaping scouts.

It began to look black indeed for the latter.

The doubly laden ponies could not long keep ahead of the pursuers.

They soon began to gain rapidly.

"This will never do! In ten minutes the Sioux will be upon us!" said Curley.

"Wah! Let me down and ride on!" said the scout whom Curley had taken up.

"And you, too, brother, do you do the same. It is better that two should escape, than all should be taken," bravely said the warrior who rode with the other mounted scout.

"Never! Curley, the Crow, is a great brave. He will never desert a brother," cried the chief of scouts.

"Wah! So Red Rifle say," asserted the other Indian who had been appealed to.

"What can we do, then?" asked one of the warriors who had lost his mount.

"We must dismount, plunge into the hills, and try to throw the Sioux off the trail," cried Curley.

"And failing in that?" asked Red Rifle.

"We must choose a position and fight to the death!"

"To the death!"

"While we have a shot left."

The determination thus voiced was carried out so far as the abandoning of the two now well-nigh exhausted ponies went.

Leaping from the two ponies which had carried double, Curley and his three comrades dashed into the hills at the foot of which they had just been riding.

The sides of the hills were covered with stunted timber, and among them rocks and boulders were plentifully strewn.

The Sioux seemed to understand the intention of the friendly scouts at once.

They dismounted when they came up with the abandoned ponies of the Custer scouts.

Leaving several braves in charge of their mounts, the Sioux scattered and began beating the cover along the hillsides where the disguised scouts had disappeared.

The latter were discovered in a short time.

They had gained the top of a round hill.

There they noted that the situation was one possessed of many natural advantages for defense.

The top of the hill was a plateau nearly level, and all around were rocks and boulders like a natural breastwork.

For some distance on all sides the hill was barren of vegetation toward its base.

And there were very few rocks or boulders which could serve to shield an advancing enemy.

"Here we must make a stand. Wah! It shall be a good fight, if we lose our scalps! We cannot retreat much farther without deserting the hills, when we should soon be run down and captured," said Curley.

"Wah! Chief say true," assented Red Rifle.

"And Curley has not forgotten that he carries some of the yellow-haired chief's signal-rockets," continued the Crow scout.

"But the chief cannot use them now."

"No, not to any good purpose. Not until darkness comes."

"And then?"

"Oh, if we can hold the hilltop until then, we can send up the rockets."

"And they will be seen in Custer's camp?"

"Yes, and he will send us help."

"We must hold the hilltop."

"Wah! while we have a round of ammunition left."

In a moment the four brave Indian scouts took advantageous positions on the hilltop.

Each one leveled his rifle over the natural barricade of rocks which encircled the party.

On came the Sioux.

Soon a couple of warriors appeared on the open hillside, and at the same instant the repeating rifles in the hands of Curley and one of his comrades cracked.

The foremost Sioux leaped into the air, uttering a terrible yell, and then went crashing down, shot through the heart.

The other was shot through the arm.

Dropping his rifle, he staggered back, and disappeared in a clump of bushes.

The other Sioux halted.

The fate of their leader had taught them caution.

But creeping stealthily around in the cover below the barren space which extended for two or three hundred yards toward the hill top, the Sioux soon completely surrounded the summit.

Now and then an Indian could be seen at the edge of the timber.

The Crow scout and his friends were alert and fully aware of the movements of the enemy.

"We are besieged. Wah! The Sioux mean to keep us here until we have no ammunition, if they can't get at us sooner," said Curley.

It was the truth. The Sioux kept firing occasionally at the hilltop for some time. Then at a given signal from Cutnose the Sioux charged from all sides at once.

The besieged scouts worked the triggers of their repeating Winchesters like lightning.

A rain of leaden bullets descended upon the charging hostiles.

They were repulsed.

And they carried the dead and wounded away with them.

After that only an occasional shot was fired by the Sioux for some time.

But at length one of the hostiles leaped upon a rock, and waving a white rag at the muzzle of his gun, shouted for a "talk."

"What do you want?" demanded Curley in the Sioux language.

"The renegade Indians must surrender! They cannot escape!" was the reply.

"When we surrender you are welcome to our scalps, dog of a Sioux! Bah! The Sioux are old women. We have outwitted

you once—we will do so again!" shouted Curley, tauntingly. The spokesman of the hostiles' only rejoinder was a threatening yell.

Then he leaped down from the rock and disappeared.

After that the hours passed until nightfall, and only an occasional shot was exchanged between the besieged and their foes.

But meanwhile, leaving them, we must return to Yellowstone Jack, Gen. Custer's youngest aide.

The young lad was of course much rejoiced at his respite, and he meant to improve the slightest chance for escape which the chapter of incidents yet to come might possibly present for him.

Just at nightfall old Wahnatach entered the lodge in which Jack was confined. The lad was no longer bound. He looked at the old Sioux medicine woman, and the idea of a daring stratagem flashed upon his mind.

"Wah! white boy be burnt at stake yet. Now Wahnatach make him howl. Now she'll beat him so he'll never run away again," hissed the old Indian fury, and she raised a heavy knotted bludgeon to strike the boy, when, with the leap of a tiger, he bounded upon the fierce hag and caught her by the throat.

CHAPTER XVI.

GEN. CUSTER'S CAMP.

Meantime, Gen. Custer in camp at the burnt ranch of Zadok, the renegade, impatiently awaited the return of Curley, the chief of Indian scouts, and Yellowstone Jack.

The gallant officer was troubled by many doubts and misgivings. He dreaded lest his invaluable friendlies and the boy aide might fall into the hands of the hostiles.

And he was most anxious on account of Ethel Readon, the daughter of the murdered paymaster.

If she was not rescued, he felt he could never forgive himself for having allowed her to accompany the expedition.

And yet her presence he had deemed essential, as she alone could positively recognize the murderer of her father in the suspect—Zadok.

Custer was harassed, too, by doubts as to the plans of Sitting Bull.

He knew he had the most wily Indian leader in all the Wild West to contend with.

But, despite the assurances of the boy prairie courier that the great Sioux was massing a tremendous force against him, Custer did not imagine anything like the truth.

And nine out of ten officers of the frontier army would have deemed it impossible that Sitting Bull could concentrate such a force as he had assembled.

The army records and the reports of the Indian agents all go to show that the strength of the hostiles was vastly underrated from the beginning.

Gen. Custer's anxiety grew apace as the hours went by, and still the friendly scouts and Yellowstone Jack did not return.

He paced restlessly up and down before his tent for a long time.

And he sent out scouts to give warning of the approach of the friendlies, or the coming of the treacherous enemy.

It was to these scouts he was indebted for the capture of Sitting Bull's son.

Young Long Knife and a few Sioux scouts were surprised by Custer's scouts at a distance of but a few miles north of the troopers' camp.

A short, sharp fight ensued.

And the only captive taken was the great chief's son. All his comrades escaped, and Long Knife would have been equally fortunate but for the fact that his pony was shot under him when in full retreat.

Then he was overtaken by the white scouts.

It was one of Long Knife's comrades who brought the intelligence of the capture of his son to Sitting Bull.

The young redskin was brought before Gen. Custer.

There he stood, silent and sullen, but erect and defiant, among his captors.

He would not shame the reputation of his sire, and though he was then on his first war-path, he comforted himself, as be-hooved one upon whose shoulders the mantle of the great Sitting Bull might one day fall.

Custer questioned the young Sioux.

At first he would make no answer. But finally he said with fierce dignity in the Sioux tongue, which an interpreter duly translated:

"Long Knife is a great brave; he will tell the pale-faces nothing, save that soon their scalps shall hang at the belts of Sitting Bull's warriors."

And nothing more could be elicited by persuasion or threats. An old scout cried out:

"Give the pizen varmint a taste of Injun treatment. Put him to the stake and let him feel the flames, and it will loosen his tongue."

But Gen. Custer rebuked the old scout, saying:

"We are not savages. Away with the young Indian; after all, he is acting with savage chivalry."

So Long Knife was hurried to the guard tent.

And sentinels closely guarded him after that.

The next day not an Indian was seen, but the camp was alert and watchful.

We know that Sitting Bull was lying low.

Custer had not yet entered the hills, and on the open prairie the Indians do not fight well.

Even with his great force Sitting Bull would not risk a conflict on the plains. No. He would curb his impatience until he had lured the yellow-haired chief of the whites into the chosen fighting grounds of the Sioux.

When night drew on again, and there was no news from the daring band who had gone forth to attempt the rescue of the white maiden and gain information about the enemy, Custer was inclined to give them up for lost.

His men were eager to advance.

The younger officers frequently urged their commander to give the order to march.

They had so frequently been successful in their raids against the Sioux that they had acquired a certain degree of contempt for their red foes.

Brave Tom Custer, the general's brother, who was with the expedition, was one of the most urgent for an advance against the enemy.

"We shall defeat them easily enough. Holding off only encourages them, and gives them time to strengthen their forces," he said.

But Custer would not advance.

He had the plan of campaign for conquering Sitting Bull in mind, as it had previously been mapped out, and it seemed pretty certain of success at the outset.

When he left Fort Lincoln it was understood that Generals Crook and Gibbons with their commands were to operate with them.

It was supposed Sitting Bull could at the utmost assemble but about eight hundred warriors, and Custer, Crook, and Gibbons were all to come at the Sioux at the same time.

Generals Crook and Gibbons were to unite with Custer on the Yellowstone. But to that point they were to take separate

routes, to guard against the escape of the Sioux southward if they sought to retreat.

But the delay in getting a start caused the expedition to be begun too late in the year to surprise the Indians.

The general belief of the leaders of the expedition was that Sitting Bull was to be found on the Yellowstone, between the Big Horn and Powder rivers.

The Missouri river describes nearly a quarter circle all around this region, at a distance of some three hundred miles.

All the time the expedition was getting away from the forts the force of Sitting Bull was being augmented from all the great Indian agencies in the territory bounded by the Missouri.

At the last moment Gen. Custer had received orders to scout for Sitting Bull on his own account, and if Generals Crook and Gibbons had not joined him when the enemy was found, to fight if his force was sufficient.

Custer meant to obey orders, but what Yellowstone Jack, the boy prairie aide had told him, made him hesitate about charging Sitting Bull.

He did not know that three days before Crook had been attacked and driven back by three thousand of Sitting Bull's warriors.

Crook was advancing from Fort Laramie, so he was first to get into a fight with the Sioux.

The night which witnessed the siege of Curley and his Crow scouts on the barren hill-top, where the Sioux had hemmed them in, came on dark and cloudy.

That night, because it was a most favorable one for an Indian attack, Gen. Custer caused a double line of outposts to be placed around the camp at Zadok's ranch.

But the darkness had scarcely fully descended upon the lone wild land of the Sioux when a sentinel at the door of Gen. Custer's tent entered.

The general was sitting at a camp table, looking over a map of the Yellowstone country.

He looked up quickly when the trooper entered.

The latter saluted.

"Well, James, what is it?" asked the general.

"Signals, sir. The sentinels have just discovered rockets going up in the hills in the northwest."

"Is that so? It must be Curley is sending up the rockets. He had some with him when he left!" cried Custer.

Then he rushed out of the tent.

At that moment, as he directed eager glances to the northwest, he saw a red ball of fire flash high in the black sky, sputter and fall in a shower of flame.

Another rocket went up.

And then another.

"The help signal of our rocket code!" cried the general.

Then he shouted to an orderly:

"Take two hundred of the troops and be off to learn the meaning of the signals. If Curley wants help, see that he gets it!"

Five minutes later the band of troopers were galloping away. Would they reach the hill in time to save the friendly scout?

CHAPTER XVII.

THE LONE SCOUT'S BATTLE WITH SITTING BULL'S SPY.

The unity of events now demands that we shall return to the hidden cave of the lone scout under the waterfall.

We left Ethel alone there at a thrilling moment, when awful peril very nearly threatened the noble girl, whom the mysteri-

ous man of the plains had so nobly rescued from the camp of Sitting Bull.

It was not long after the lone scout left the cave, to make a short scout about it, as narrated, when, hearing footsteps, Ethel became alert, and presently saw a hideously-painted Sioux warrior peering in at her through the mouth of the cave.

Revolver in hand, the girl sprang back.

But the light of the torch, sticking in a crack in the rocky floor of the cave, had revealed her to the Indian.

"Wah! White squaw found at last! Ugh! Big Bear heap glad see white squaw! Um take her back to Sitting Bull's camp. Get big jug whisky from white trader, Zadok," uttered the Sioux, gutturally, in broken English.

The redskin advanced.

The young girl was frozen with terror.

She wanted to scream, but her tongue seemed to cleave to the roof of her mouth, and she could make no utterance.

With an exultant grin upon his painted face, the redskin continued to approach.

Ethel recoiled, and caught up the torch in one hand.

Then she leveled her revolver.

The Indian had not previously seen the weapon, for she held it concealed in the folds of her dress.

Evidently he had believed her to be unarmed.

Quick as thought the imperilled girl pressed the trigger.

But the weapon was not discharged.

A cartridge had slipped so as to hold the cylinder.

The Indian made a forward leap, uttering an exultant cry, for he was sure of his prey then.

But just then Ethel flashed the brilliant light of the flaming pine torch upon the wall at her side.

It was there that the hideous human figures of life-like and gigantic size, carved by some forgotten race of aborigines, stood forth in bold relief like a grotesque phalanx of giants.

The Indian saw them.

He must have thought he beheld a troop of living men, who were about to spring upon him.

He leaped back, wheeled about and darted to the mouth of the cave.

Again Ethel tried to discharge her revolver, but again the weapon refused to act.

And the young girl thought with a feeling of despair at her heart:

"The Sioux will escape and bring his comrades to the cave. We are lost!"

At this juncture she would have given ten years of her life for the appearance of the lone scout.

She found her voice and uttered a loud and thrilling scream.

As the utterance escaped her lips the Sioux was about to bound away through the entrance of the hidden cave.

But what was that?

Oh, joy—joy! Ethel clapped her hands as she threw aside the weapon which had proved useless.

Just then a human form, which she recognized at a glance, appeared at the mouth of the hidden cave to bar the way of the escaping Sioux.

The lone scout had come.

His rifle sprang to his shoulder.

But, before he could discharge the weapon, the Sioux ducked down and ran in on him, while with the other he sought to stab the white man with his hunting knife.

The lone scout dropped his rifle.

And a desperate hand-to-hand struggle ensued between him and the Indian.

Both fell upon the floor of the cave.

And they fought like tigers.

Ethel watched the conflict for a moment. It seemed to her the lone scout was getting the worst of it.

But suddenly the Indian uttered an awful, half-smothered yell.

And the lone scout bounded to his feet with his hunting knife, which was bathed in the life blood of the murderous savage in his hand.

The young girl turned sick and faint.

And she sank heavily upon the cave floor before the lone scout could reach her.

When she recovered her senses she found the brave man who had so nobly protected her bending over her.

"Fear not. The Sioux is dead!" he said, in reassuring tones.

Ethel regained her feet and asked anxiously:

"Are there any more Indians near?"

"I have discovered a small war party, to which, no doubt, the Indian I have slain belonged."

"Then we must remain here?"

"Yes. It is our only chance."

"How long must we stay hidden in this cave?"

"It is impossible to tell; but we must not think of venturing forth while there are any of the hostiles in the neighborhood."

Then Ethel told the scout how his weapon had failed, and how terribly the Sioux had been frightened by the figures carved upon the wall of the cave.

Ethel's guardian finally prevailed upon her to seek sleep.

He spread a buffalo robe on a couch of boughs in the rear end of the main cavern, and Ethel reclined there while he kept watch at the entrance of the cave, mentally resolved that no harm should reach her while he lived.

The night wore on.

For a long time Ethel could not sleep.

But at last exhausted nature succumbed, and her trembling nerves became quiet. Her heavy breathing assured the lone scout she slept.

Leaning upon his long rifle, he remained on the watch.

It was about midnight when above the roar of the falls, which concealed the entrance of the cave, he caught a faint sound.

At first he was not sure of its cause, but as it came again he knew it was the yell of an Indian. Once or twice more the yell reached him.

"Ha! It is the peculiar signal yell by which the Sioux scouts announce the discovery of a sought-for trail," he muttered.

And he suspected that some white fugitive, seeking to escape the vengeance of the Sioux, had been successfully tracked by the red demon whose signal yell he had heard.

But the lone scout did not leave the cave, and the long hours which marked the period of his night vigil drew their slow length along until the dawn.

And through the canopy of falling water beyond the entrance of the cave the light of a new day found its way in a thousand prismatic sunbeams dancing in the silvery sheen of spray.

Then the lone scout awoke the sleeping girl.

They partook of food, and Ethel was rejoiced to learn that there had been no alarm during the night save that of the distant Indian scout.

The mysterious man of the plains saw Ethel shudder as she looked upon the hideous form of the dead Indian, and he hastened to put it out of sight.

He dragged the body out of the cave and cast it into the foaming whirlpool under the falls. Then he once more went forth on a scout, assuring Ethel he meant soon to return.

CHAPTER XVIII.

YELLOWSTONE JACK'S STRATAGEM.

When old Wahnatach, the medicine woman of the Sioux, came to beat Yellowstone Jack in the prison lodge at Sitting

Bull's camp, it has been stated that the Boy Prairie Courier flew at the vindictive creature and caught her by the throat.

The idea of a daring stratagem, which had flashed upon the mind of the youth, came like an inspiration, and his prompt action completely surprised the old medicine woman.

She struggled desperately to free herself from the tenacious hold which Yellowstone Jack had fixed upon her throat.

But she was unable to free herself.

And she could not utter a sound.

The boy strangled her. Gradually her struggles grew weaker.

And finally she sank insensible upon the earth.

Then the daring boy aide of Gen. Custer crept stealthily to the entrance of the lodge, lifted the flap of deerskin which hung before it and peered forth.

The shadows of night had fallen.

Darkness was closing down upon the great camp of the hostiles, and already here and there the evening fires had been kindled before the long rows of wigwams.

Jack could see the dusky forms of the Sioux warriors and squaws moving hither and yon about the campfires, while the odor of broiled venison filled the air.

Near the door of his lodge two warriors stood on guard.

But their manner proclaimed they neither knew nor suspected what was taking place in the prison lodge.

While his heart beat fast with excitement, the boy courier crept back to the side of the insensible old medicine woman.

Then he set about the preliminary steps looking to the accomplishment of the greatest and most perilous attempt of his life—to outwit the wily Sioux.

The lad quickly possessed himself of the strange feathered and beaded head-dress worn by the Sioux hag.

And he removed the blanket tunic she wore. He was about the same height as the old medicine woman, and he quickly donned her head-dress and tunic.

Then, by means of the stain and paint he found in a pocket of the hag's outer garment, he made up his face like that of the old woman.

This done, he took the twisted medicine stick, carved like a serpent, which she always carried when she went abroad.

"Now I am ready," he reflected. "If I can only pass the sentinels around the camp in safety, I think I shall stand a good chance of getting to Custer's camp."

Then, having dragged the still insensible old hag into the darkest corner of the lodge, he bound and gagged her, using thongs he found upon her person.

At last he was ready to leave the lodge.

With the twisted medicine stick in his hand, he strode boldly forth.

The sentinels had, of course, seen the medicine woman when she entered the lodge.

And they took the boy for her.

The gloom favored him, and the sentinels did not bestow a second glance upon him as he hobbled away.

He passed them in safety.

And then he sauntered to the eastern end of the camp, and soon passed the last camp-fire, unheeded by the Sioux.

After that he quickened his pace.

And presently he saw the tall figure of an Indian sentinel ahead.

The boy went straight toward the sentinel.

"Wah, Wahnatach, where go?" he asked.

"Ugh! The serpent weed grows in the woods. When the medicine woman wants it she seeks it in the moonlight, which will soon be here," answered the boy.

He was so familiar with the tones of the Sioux hag that he could imitate her voice perfectly.

The sentinel grunted and allowed the disguised boy to pass on without further questioning.

Jack soon left the camp at some distance behind him.

Anon the moon and stars began to illuminate the night.

Guiding himself by the nocturnal luminaries and walking swiftly, for he had not dared to attempt to recover his horse, he pressed on.

Meantime, Jack had been gone from the Sioux camp for perhaps an hour, when the sentinels at the door of the lodge from which he had escaped heard a strange sound from within it.

The noise was a smothered groan.

It was repeated again and again.

The sentinels at length strode to the door, and drawing aside the flap, peered within.

At first, on account of the darkness, they were unable to discern anything.

But the eyes of the Indians are sharp by night as well as by day.

At length, becoming accustomed to the gloom, the two sentinels were able to see the form of the medicine woman.

In a moment they reached her and dragged her out into the open beyond the door.

Then they saw she was bound and gagged, and the realization of the ruse which the daring white boy had employed to dupe them flashed upon their minds instantly.

They knew he had passed them in the garb of the medicine woman.

While one of the sentinels removed the gag from between the jaws of the hag and cut the thongs with which Yellowstone Jack had secured her, the other sent up the loud and shrill alarm yell of the tribe.

In a few moments all was excitement and confusion about the lodge.

Sitting Bull was alarmed and enraged, because if Yellowstone Jack reached Gen. Custer in safety he would have no prisoner to hold as a hostage for the safety of his son, who had been captured by the troopers as stated.

The pursuit of the white lad was immediately undertaken by a score of Sioux warriors.

They questioned the sentinels.

And from the one whom Jack had spoken with they learned which way the lad had gone.

They procured torches.

And by the light thus afforded they sought for and found Jack's trail.

While they followed it the moon and stars came forth—and then they discarded their torches and went forward on the trail more swiftly than before.

Jack feared pursuit.

And he made the best possible speed.

He had obtained a good start, and he most feared he might encounter some band of Sitting Bull's numerous parties of scouts coming back to the great camp.

Suddenly he paused and listened intently.

He caught the roar of a distant waterfall.

"Ah! I am nearing the falls of the white water!" he said, bestowing the Indian name upon a swift hill stream that he had often fished in when he dwelt among the red men.

He knew the falls well.

And it was on the route he had chosen to escape from the hills.

So he went on toward it.

But he had not proceeded far when he heard voices to the right. Instantly he recognized the guttural tones of the Sioux.

He knew a scouting party on their way back to Sitting Bull's camp was near. He started forward, and a dry stick broke under his foot with a sharp sound. He ran swiftly after that.

But a few moments subsequently a loud yell rang out behind him.

He glanced back and saw a dozen dusky forms upon his trail.

CHAPTER XIX.

SAVED BY A RUSE.

The situation of Curley, the Crow scout, and his brave comrades whom we left on the barren hilltop still remained one of extreme peril.

Curley and his followers had a respite from the assault of the Sioux who had hemmed them in as the night drew on.

But the wily Crow knew the enemy were closely watching his position.

Occasionally a feathered head could be seen when a Sioux appeared at the edge of the fringe of timber below the barren hillside.

"They are only waiting for the darkness," said Curley to one of his men, as the shadows lengthened.

"Wah!" replied the Indian addressed. "The Sioux will creep up when it is dark."

"Yes, and if they reach us before I can bring help by sending up a signal rocket we shall all be slain."

Curley spoke in the Crow tongue, which the other understood.

"We must make everything ready now," he added.

"Against the time when it will be dark enough to see fire a long way?"

"Yes, we must send up the rockets as soon as night has completely fallen."

"Wah!" was the laconic assent.

While the others watched the enemy, and occasionally discharged a shot when a feathered head was seen above the bushes down the hill, Curley and the Indian to whom he had spoken, as above recorded, soon got out the rockets.

Then they prepared everything.

At last Curley announced that the gloom was sufficiently deep.

And he sent up the first signal—the rocket whose mission was to bring deliverance to the devoted little band of friends, who were so completely hemmed in by their deadly foes.

Up—up into the black vault of the overcast heavens, above the hilltop, which had proved a fortress for the red heroes, shot the ball of fire.

Up—up, glaring, scintillating against the black background of the sky like a meteor earth-driven into space.

Higher and higher soared the fire-ball, and as it ascended, a chorus of fierce and threatening yells rang out from the Sioux.

But answering war-cries, full and defiant, pealed from the lips of Custer's red scouts like a cheer to speed the light of the help beacon on its way on high.

The Sioux had seen the fire ball signals of the troopers in times gone by.

They knew the scouts they had hemmed in were seeking to tell Custer, by means of the rocket, that they needed help.

The second rocket quickly followed the first.

Then came the third.

But Custer and his braves in blue were far away.

We have seen how the signal rockets were seen in the troopers' camp.

We have recorded how Gen. Custer, who never left his scouts in peril if he could help them, immediately dispatched a force of two hundred men to the rescue.

But the darkness was come.

The ammunition of Curley's force was almost exhausted.

It seemed the Sioux would reach them under cover of the night.

Not very long after the last rocket exploded high up in the somber sky, sending forth a shower of sparks, the Sioux sounded the battle yell anew.

A volley of rifle shots came hurtling through the night at the scouts on the barren hilltop.

"Wah! They come! They come! The Sioux are charging up the hill!" cried Curley.

It was so.

The foe could be heard on all sides.

The pandemonium was frightful.

The yells of the Sioux were mingled with the incessant reports of firearms.

One who has never taken part in a battle cannot adequately comprehend all the horror and excitement of the night conflict we are seeking to depict.

The friendly scouts of Custer's crouched side by side.

Shoulder to shoulder the red heroes of the Yellowstone meant to make their last fight.

They leveled their rifles over the rude barricade they had erected.

And they opened fire as the foe advanced.

But they could not see the enemy.

They had to be guided in their aim wholly by the flash of firearms on the hillside.

Nearer and nearer came the foe.

The repeating rifles of Curley and his braves became heated.

They knew the end must soon come.

Once the red fiends, whom Sitting Bull had leagued for murder and rapine on the border, reached the barricade all was lost.

Death under the hatchet and the scalping knife stared the besieged scouts in the face.

Or, it might be, their lives would be temporarily spared in order that they might perish at the torture stake.

The Sioux had an old grudge against Curley.

And indeed they were, if possible, more bitterly in their hatred of the red men who served Custer than of the whites themselves.

What terrible reflections as to what the immediate future might hold in store for them must have flashed through the minds of the scouts.

But what was that?

Suddenly the shouts of the white men were heard at the foot of the hill.

And then came a rattling volley of rifle shots.

The bullets hurtled among the rear ranks of the charging Sioux, the foremost of whom had almost reached the barricade on the hilltop which sheltered Curley and his men.

"Charge them, men! Forward by fours! Charge!" shouted a ringing voice from the rear of the Sioux.

Nothing could have occurred to so completely surprise and demoralize the Sioux.

Of all things, the Sioux dreads being caught between two fires.

The red demons thought Custer's troopers were upon them.

On account of the gloom they could form no estimate of the number of the troopers. But they believed they must be numerous.

The Sioux broke and fled down the hill away from the direction when the volley from the rear and the shouts of the whites had sounded.

Curley and his braves were amazed and delighted.

But they knew it could not be that troopers from Gen. Custer's camp had arrived.

It would require some hours for the men from Custer's camp to reach them.

Curley thought it must be a party of scouts had chanced to be near the hill when he sent up the signal rocket.

What then was his surprise when presently a voice out of the darkness, quite near the breastworks on the hilltop, reached him, shouting:

"Don't fire, Curley. I'm Yellowstone Jack!"

The next moment the boy prairie courier leaped the barricade.

After him came a tall man.

One of the scouts was about to shoot at the second figure, when he exclaimed:

"Hold! I am the Lone Scout, and Custer's friend!"

It was so.

Yellowstone Jack and the lone scout were warmly welcomed.

And the brave boy of the wild northwest hastened to say:

"Now, Curley, you want to get out of this before the Sioux find out we have worked the stratagem and fooled them!"

"What white boy mean?" demanded Curley.

"That the lone scout and I are all alone. We made the Sioux think we were a large force, but I fear they'll soon discover the truth."

"Boy say true. Scouts go quick!"

A moment later the entire party were creeping away down the hillside.

CHAPTER XX.

HOW YELLOWSTONE JACK AND THE LONE SCOUT MET.

The friendly scouts and the two friends who had so cunningly scattered the Sioux reached the foot of the hill.

No Indians were encountered on the way.

When the plains were reached the lone scout said:

"Now I must leave you."

"Where go?" asked Curley.

"To look to the safety of the paymaster's daughter."

"Ugh! then great white hunter have white gal hidden?"

"Yes. But I will not stay to talk. Push on to Custer's camp. Tell him not to give Sitting Bull battle until he receives strong reinforcements. Assure him Ethel Readon is safe for the present in a hidden retreat of mine."

"Ugh! Curley do as white hunter say."

"Good-by, Curley!" cried Yellowstone Jack.

"Where boy go?"

"With the lone scout."

"Why do that?"

"To help save the white girl."

"Ugh! good-by. Tell Curley where to send hoss soldiers to bring in white gal."

The lone scout replied before the boy could do so.

He said:

"Until Custer is strongly reinforced the young girl is safer in the hiding place where I have hidden her than she can be with the daring officer's little army. I tell you, Curley, Sitting Bull has sworn to massacre General Custer and all his force. Go, go! and once more warn Custer!"

"Me go!"

There was a silent grasping of hands.

Then the red scouts glided on.

They went toward Custer's camp.

In the darkest night those experienced Indians would not be astray.

It seemed a sort of instinct guided them.

The lone scout and Yellowstone Jack set out swiftly in another direction.

They went toward the secret cave under the waterfall where the mysterious man of the plains had hidden the daughter of the murdered paymaster.

But how came Yellowstone Jack in the company of the man of mystery?

And how did the brave border lad who had entered the service of Gen. Custer elude the Sioux whom we left upon his trail?

And this must be made clear.

We recall first the fact that Yellowstone Jack was fleeing in the disguise of old Wahnatach, the medicine woman.

He had gone some distance from the great camp of the hostiles whom Sitting Bull had assembled.

Then he heard guttural voices near.

Then he recognized the tones of the Sioux.

He had started forward at increased speed, when he heard the sound of the falls in the stream the Indians called the white water.

It was under that falls that the secret cave of the lone scout was situated.

Jack had not gone but a few paces after he heard the voices of the Sioux, when, as previously stated, a stick broke under his foot with a sharp snap.

Then he bounded on like the wind.

But he glanced back, and saw several Sioux warriors in pursuit of him.

After that Jack ran for the falls.

Like an inspiration, the recollection suddenly came to him of a forgotten secret.

It was the secret of the hidden cave.

Jack then remembered that a white trapper had told him the secret of the cave when he died in the lodge of his cruel Indian foster-mother years previously.

The boy had not thought of the trapper's dying revelation for years.

It seemed to him like a Providential thing that the memory of the secret which he had forgotten in early childhood should have returned to him like a revelation of possible salvation at that moment of the most imminent and thrilling peril.

The Sioux runners were gaining upon him.

They were some of Sitting Bull's scouts.

The whole country thronged with the parties whom Sitting Bull kept constantly ranging the country through which the troops must advance to reach him.

Jack had never visited the secret cave under the falls of the white water.

But he now resolved to try to gain that retreat.

Indeed, it was his only hope.

He thought intently as he bounded on and on of all that the old white trapper had revealed to him about the cave.

The memory of all the clear and most explicit directions which the dying white man had given him for finding the entrance of the cave came back to him.

The roar of the falls sounded louder and louder as he ran on.

The Sioux continued to gain.

It became an awful, thrilling question in the mind of the boy fugitive if he could reach the cave in time.

And he knew to reach it and make a safe refuge, the Sioux who so closely followed him must be left out of sight when he entered the waterfall.

Otherwise they would, of course, at once obtain the clew to the secret.

At last Jack plunged through a thicket and reached the falls.

The cover through which he had just made his way shut him out from the Sioux.

He lost not a moment, but dashed boldly under the blinding sheet of falling water which hid the mouth of the cave.

A moment later he sank down exhausted against the steep ledge, but he was hidden from the Sioux by the curtain of falling water.

Jack rested for some time.

Then he crept along and sought to find the entrance to the cave.

But he passed it without discovering it, and finally he crept under a sheltering ledge beneath the falls, and soon fell asleep.

The new day had dawned when he awoke.

The sun was shining on the falling water which screened him.

Suddenly, as he started up, he heard a footstep.

The heart of the hunted boy beat fast.

He listened eagerly.

Someone was coming along the ledge under the falls.

The next moment the boy beheld the tall figure of a man in the uncertain light.

At a second glance the border boy recognized the lone scout.

The latter saw Jack as he sprang forward, exclaiming:

"I am the Boy Prairie Courier!"

The lone scout was surprised. But he welcomed the lad warmly.

Jack told how he had escaped from Sitting Bull's camp.

And he also made known how he had come to seek a hiding place under the falls.

The lone scout led him to the cave.

There he met Ethel Readon, and further explanations were made.

The lone scout had just returned from a scout. He remained with the boy and the paymaster's daughter all day. Toward evening he went out on another scout. It was now the night on which Curley sent up the signal rockets.

The lone scout saw the rockets later.

CHAPTER XXI.

CURLEY AND HIS SCOUTS REACH GEN. CUSTER.

The discovery of the rocket signals by the lone scout caused him to conjecture that there was a force of soldiers near.

But he scouted forward stealthily.

Ere long he heard the occasional report of firearms.

He drew still nearer the position of Curley and the friendly scouts.

And he soon gained an idea of the situation.

Two Sioux warriors passed close by him as he crouched in a thicket.

From their remarks the lone scout learned that Curley and his men were hemmed in on the barren hilltop.

Then the scout sped away.

He reached the hidden cave in an incredibly short time, and, with Jack, to whom he explained everything, he returned:

Fortunately the Sioux delayed their charge, after the explosion of the last rocket which Curley sent up until Yellowstone Jack and the lone scout came up.

They had decided on the ruse to frighten off the Sioux, which we have seen proved entirely successful.

But now, leaving the boy prairie courier and the lone scout in the hidden cave, we must return to the camp of the hostiles.

On the morning following the night of the escape of Curley and the friendly scouts from the hilltop, Sitting Bull called

the head chief and Zadok, the renegade, to the council lodge. "Brothers," said the great Indian leader, when all had assembled, "the Yellow-Haired chief can never be led to attack us here. The trap has failed."

"I think you are right," said Zadok.

"I am sure of it."

"What new plan have you, chief, for I am sure you do not mean to abandon the game to lure Custer to his doom?"

"No. Sitting Bull never gives up a project once he has formed it. But the spies who have escaped from our camp, and particularly the white boy, will tell the Yellow-Haired chief how strong we are. Custer is brave—he is a great brave—but even he will not dare to attack us here."

"Then you must move?"

"Yes. We must scatter the great force of the Sioux, but only to reunite again further up the valley of the Little Big Horn."

"Good!"

"We will leave only one trail, and that not too large for Custer to follow. The other trails will be hidden before they reunite. The Yellow-Haired chief will think the Sioux have scattered, and that, after all, they are afraid to stand a battle."

"Just so."

"We will send a renegade to tell Custer we have fled. He will send scouts. They will see our renegade has told the truth—that the great camp is deserted. When Custer hears this he will only feel afraid we may get away from him. He will follow the trail we have left plain, and that will lead him to a small Sioux village."

"And then what, chief?"

"The whites will attack our small village, when suddenly from out of the defiles and covers I'll hurl my thousands of red braves upon them and slay them all."

A low murmur of admiration went up from the assembled chiefs.

"You are a great general, chief, and I think your new plan of the campaign will succeed. But when shall we break camp?"

"At once."

"Who is the renegade you mean to send to Custer?"

"One of your men. The new one, who has been with you but a few days."

"All right, chief."

"Call the man in."

The white ally of the Sioux obeyed.

In a moment a ruffianly-looking white man, who had come with Zadok from his ranch, entered the presence of the assembled chiefs.

This fellow was not known to the whites of the frontier as a renegade. He bore the reputation of being an honest white trapper.

But he had long been secretly in the service of Zadok.

Sitting Bull addressed the rascal.

The red chief instructed him to make his way to Custer's camp and give the general the news that the Sioux had scattered and fled in every direction.

The renegade agreed to do the bidding of Sitting Bull.

A little later he left the camp.

Orders were then issued by Sitting Bull.

The result was that in an hour's time the whole force had scattered and were on the move.

The cunning red men separated into small bands for the most part, just as Sitting Bull had at the council declared they should do.

One party was larger than any other. They dragged their tent poles from the back of their ponies so as to make a plain trail.

With this party went Sitting Bull and Zadok, the renegade.

The white man whom Sitting Bull had dispatched to the camp of Gen. Custer rode swiftly.

Meantime Curley and his scouts, after leaving the barren hill-top where it had seemed for a time they were hopelessly imperiled, had pressed on steadily.

If the Sioux pursued them they did not know it, for the enemy did not find their trail, or come close to them.

After some hours Curley and his companions sighted advancing men as the night grew lighter with the appearance of the moon.

At first the scouts could not decide whether or not the men they had sighted were mounted Indians or troopers.

The latter approached cautiously.

But Curley soon uttered a signal yell which informed the cavalymen of his identity.

Then the cavalry force galloped up.

They were the men Gen. Custer had sent to find the parties who had sent up the rockets.

Curley related his story, and, with the troopers, he and his comrades made their way back to Custer's camp.

There Curley made his report, and, of course, the gallant officer was rejoiced to learn that Ethel Readon had been rescued from the Sioux and that Yellowstone Jack was safe; but Gen. Custer did not approve of the conduct of the lone scout.

"He should have brought the paymaster's daughter back to camp at once, and Yellowstone Jack should have returned too. The lone scout is foolish to think I shall allow old Sitting Bull to catch me in a trap," said Custer.

Then Curley told all about the strength of Sitting Bull's forces, and Custer looked grave. He said:

"Of course I shall not attack the Sioux, since their numbers so vastly exceed my estimate—at least, not until reinforcements arrive or the reds scatter."

Just then an orderly came up and announced:

"Long Knife, Sitting Bull's son, has made his escape!"

CHAPTER XXII.

THE SECRET OF THE LONE SCOUT.

Having reached the hidden cave under the waterfall, after parting with Curley and the friendly scouts, whom they had saved by the daring stratagem at the barren hill, Yellowstone Jack and the lone scout held a consultation.

Then the lone scout turned to Ethel.

"The time has come when I feel that I should reveal to you, my dear Ethel, a secret of my life; for if I should be slain before you are once more safe at a settlement, I should always regret that you would never know who I really am."

The scout paused.

But the paymaster's daughter and the boy prairie courier remained silent, and waited for him to continue.

After a moment's reflection, the strange man of mystery proceeded, as follows:

"Ethel, you have, no doubt, heard your father tell the story of his brother—your uncle, Jasper Readon?"

"Yes," replied Ethel.

"Then you know all the sad history of that unfortunate man; but let me assure you that he was innocent."

"I have always thought so, and my poor father shared my belief."

"I am rejoiced to hear that. But let me review the facts. Jasper Readon was accused of the murder of a rival, and he disappeared. His flight was taken as evidence of guilt, but really he fled because he knew the circumstantial evidence

against him was too strong for him to combat without conclusive proof."

"Yes," said Ethel, as he paused.

"Very well. Jasper Readon really left his home to seek for the evidence of his innocence. He knew the man who committed the crime of which he was accused, but lacked the evidence to convict the latter. He set out to track down the guilty."

"Did he succeed?"

"Partially."

"But he died. The story reached us that my Uncle Jasper was lynched in Colorado."

"The wretches who lynched Jasper Readon when he was in Colorado close upon the trail of the man who committed the crime of which he was falsely accused, branded your uncle upon the breast with the branding-iron used for marking cattle. Then they hurled their intended victim into the depths of Red Gulch."

"But he was not killed. How did he escape?" Ethel eagerly asked.

"A friendly Indian rescued him, and though he was sorely wounded he recovered fully in the wigwam of the red man who befriended him, and he is still upon the trail of the man whose crime made him an outcast."

He paused and added:

"The man Jasper Readon is seeking to bring to justice is your father's murderer, Barnabas Zadok, and I am Jasper Readon!"

At last the secret of the lone scout was out.

Ethel and the boy prairie courier were much surprised, and Ethel exclaimed joyfully:

"Now I comprehend, dear uncle, why you have so heroically risked your life in my behalf, and also why, from the time of our first meeting, you inspired me with trust and confidence."

"Yes, my dear niece, I resolved as soon as I learned who you were to become your friend and guardian in this wild land, where so many perils are to be encountered."

"And," he went on, "now let me finish my story."

"By all means!" cried Ethel.

"It seems like a romance!" said the boy prairie courier.

"But it is a romance of real life—a story as strange as fiction, but strictly true."

"The story of a brave man," replied Ethel, regarding her new-found uncle with a look of admiration and wonder.

"It pleases me to hear you say that. But to continue: When I had fully recovered from the wounds I received in the Colorado cattle country at the hands of Barnabas Zadok and his band, who were then located there, I took a solemn oath to conceal my identity, and become the Nemesis of Zadok."

"To avoid making a confidant of any man, I decided to work alone. So I became known as the lone scout."

"The cattle country of Colorado had become too hot to hold Barnabas Zadok and his band."

"They had committed numerous crimes."

"The vigilants had driven them out of Colorado."

"This I learned after months of illness in the lodge of the Indian who found me half dead in the Red Gulch."

"I set out on a long scout, and the trail of Barnabas Zadok was, of course, what I was in search of."

"I have wandered far and met with many adventures."

"Zadok frequently changed his name and he too was a wanderer."

"Finally he established himself here in the Yellowstone country as a pretended rancher, but really an illicit whisky trader engaged in barter with the Sioux, for whom he acted as a spy."

"Here I finally located the double murderer, and I was pre-

paring a plot to get him in my power, when Custer and his men came."

"I need say only, in concluding my history, that it was during the years of my quest for Zadok through all the wild Northwest that I won the title of the lone scout!"

"Now, as to your plans for the immediate future?" asked Jack.

"I mean to guard Ethel here until Custer's reinforcements arrive and Sitting Bull is beaten."

"I have volunteered to help you."

"I know that, my lad, but, after all, I believe I have been selfish and unjust in accepting your offer. You joined Custer, and accepted an appointment as his aide."

"But for Miss Ethel's sake I will do anything," cried Jack, as she flashed a glance so full of admiration upon the young girl that she blushed deeply.

But she hastened to say:

"Your duty is to serve Gen. Custer, Jack."

"Yes," added the lone scout. "It seems to me that you should rejoin the general."

And Ethel looked at the mysterious man who had so nobly stood by her.

"Then I will do so," said the brave boy.

When night came again he left the cave, disguised as a Sioux in the costume of one of the reds who had been slain at the barren hill, and set out for Custer's camp.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE OPENING OF CUSTER'S LAST BATTLE.

Yellowstone Jack had fallen desperately in love with the pretty daughter of the murdered paymaster.

But he has as yet scarcely dared to acknowledge the truth of his attachment even to himself.

Still, when he parted with Ethel in the secret cave of the lone scout, he pressed the little hand she gave him warmly and said:

"If any harm should come to you it would break my heart. I hope we shall soon meet again, and then I trust we may become better acquainted."

And Ethel had answered smilingly:

"I hope so, too. Good-by, and may Heaven protect you!"

The boy prairie courier reached the camp of Gen. Custer in safety.

The general welcomed him.

They had a long interview.

The lad related his thrilling experiences among the hostiles. He also told the story of the lone scout.

The interview ended, and Jack went to find Curley, who was of course, delighted to see the lad.

The next morning the renegade from the great camp of Sitting Bull, which the crafty hostile leader had broken up, came into Custer's camp.

The fellow had not taken part in the battle at Zadok's ranch. None of the troopers or Yellowstone Jack knew he was a renegade. We have previously explained that he had only very recently joined the Sioux.

And we have also shown that he had formerly been known as an honest trapper.

The fellow was sighted as he approached the camp by the friendly Indian scouts.

Curley and Yellowstone Jack rode out to meet him.

The renegade seemed rejoiced to reach the camp.

And he stated that he had just escaped from the Sioux.

He asked to be taken before Custer.

His request was complied with.

The general received the renegade in his tent.

And the fellow told the story Sitting Bull had sent him to relate to the Yellow-Haired chief in a most cunning and seemingly sincere manner.

He said that the Sioux scouts had found out that large reinforcements of soldiers were on the march to reunite with Custer, and that so the wily Sitting Bull had broken camp, and ordered his men to scatter, fearing to meet the troops when they had an adequate force.

Gen. Custer listened to the story of the renegade intently.

Then he questioned him.

But he had a shrewd rascal to deal with, and the renegade did not betray himself.

At last the general said:

"What you have stated may be all true. Then again it may be all false. I propose to test the truth of your statement. If you have told the truth you shall be well rewarded. If not, you shall be punished."

"I'm satisfied," said the renegade.

Then Custer called the guard.

"Put this man in the guard-tent, and watch him closely. Treat him as a friend, but don't let him trick you as Long Knife did. I hold you all responsible for his safe keeping."

The renegade was led away and confined in the guard-tent.

Then Custer called Curley to his tent.

And he related what the renegade had said.

"Wah!" said Curley, shaking his head. "Me think white man tell heap big lie."

"That's what I want you to find out. Take Yellowstone Jack and your scouts and try to learn if Sitting Bull has broken camp. Make haste. I fear the old rascal will escape me after all."

Curley bowed and hastened to carry out the general's orders.

Half an hour later he and Yellowstone Jack and the "friendlyes" were cautiously scouting in the direction of Sitting Bull's recent camp.

In due time they reached a hilltop, from which they could command a view of the valley in which the great force of the Sioux had been assembled.

They were surprised to see the camp was no longer there.

Everything indicated the hostiles had fled in haste.

"Wah! Curley was wrong, the white man told the truth," said Curley.

Then he and his companions made their way back to the camp of the troopers.

As soon as Custer heard their report he assembled his officers.

In a few words he made known to them that Sitting Bull had fled.

All the officers were in favor of pursuing the hostiles. So orders were issued and the command took up the line of march for Sitting Bull's recent camp. It was reached in due time.

There a broad lodge-pole trail was found, which told the direction taken by a party large enough to make a considerable village.

This trail was followed. The troopers saw no Indians, and they went into camp twenty-five miles further north. This was the 23d of June.

Next day the Sioux trail was much fresher. At sunset the column went into camp and the scouts were sent out in all directions to hunt for "signs."

The scouts came in and reported that, beyond a doubt, the Indian village was in the valley of the Little Big Horn, which was divided from the Rosebud by a ridge of hills. These hills must be crossed, and it would be impossible to do so in the daytime without being seen by the Indians. It must be done in the dark, and they must move at once. Accordingly, when

darkness fell, they moved on the weary march across the divide. They had marched three hours when the scouts came in to say the divide could not be crossed before daylight, so that all their trouble was thrown away. The regiment rested from two to five o'clock. Then the march was resumed. At eight o'clock they entered the valley of the Little Big Horn, and the Indian scouts saw the scouts of Sitting Bull on the ridges in the neighborhood. These scouts laid whip to their ponies and rode for the village which Custer's Indians declared they could see fifteen miles off. The faint smoke of the morning fires had met their vision. They knew the village must be there.

Away went the column, hoping to reach the Indian village before the Sioux scouts, or with them. They went in three battalions. Major Reno commanded one battalion, Captain Benteen another, Custer led the third. He meant to attack the enemy in front and on both flanks at once. There were twelve companies in the 7th Regiment, and one had to be left to guard the pack train. The other eleven were then divided. Custer kept five himself, for the main attack, gave three to Reno and three to Captain Benteen; Captain McDougal was in command of the company left with the packs.

Captain Benteen was sent off to the left front, in case lurking bands might be waiting to harass his flank and rear.

Benteen was ordered to rejoin the main trail as soon as he was sure the flank was clear. Reno's battalion was at the left of the main column, where Custer rode, so the advance was in three short columns—Benteen left, Reno center, Custer right. Benteen was soon out of sight between some hills, but returned to the main trail when Custer and Reno were about three miles ahead.

At about twelve o'clock the columns were in full sight of the Sioux village, where a great commotion prevailed.

Now was the time to strike. Custer said to Reno:

"Charge the village, and the whole column will support you!"

A cloud of dust hung over the village of the Sioux. Reno charged down the river, crossed at a ford, and then halted ten minutes to gather his men, formed in line, and galloped down toward the village.

By this time clouds of dust hid the Indians, but a number of braves were galloping toward him. No sooner did Custer see Reno fairly in the battle than he charged down the river to find another ford and attack the Indians in flank and rear.

And Yellowstone Jack, the boy prairie courier, rode with Custer.

About a mile below he was hidden by some tall cliffs, from whence he could see the whole village and Reno's battlefield.

CHAPTER XXIV.

CONCLUSION.

At that moment Custer made a thrilling discovery.

He saw that instead of a small village, there were at least three thousand warriors to fight.

Sitting Bull's ambush had been sprung.

Turning to Yellowstone Jack, Custer shouted:

"Ride for your life, boy, and tell Benteen to come on. Big village! Be quick! Bring packs."

The boy prairie courier galloped away with Custer's last order, and Yellowstone Jack was the last living white man that ever saw the face of the great general.

No sooner had Yellowstone Jack dashed away to carry Custer's message, than the latter rode on and disappeared behind the bluffs.

Meantime, Reno reached the village. Before him was a

great cloud of dust, cast up by the Indians. And suddenly a tremendous force of Sioux warriors came dashing out of this cloud, flogging their ponies and yelling like fiends, while they discharged a shower of bullets as they came.

The crowd was so immense, the sounds so horrible, that Reno halted instantly. In great haste he dismounted his men, sent the horses into the woods, and lined its edge with skirmishers, who began firing.

The Sioux could be seen coming on, shying off from the front and sweeping to the left to drive the soldiers into the river.

Reno suddenly changed his mind. He called for the horses and ordered his men to prepare to mount.

This caused the men to rush into the woods to reach their animals. The Sioux thought it a retreat. They tore on by the woods to get behind the soldiers. In a moment more the men were mounted and almost as soon dismounted again.

Reno had almost concluded to hold the woods when the Indians began fire from the rear.

Then Reno suddenly came to a decision. He knew he had met overwhelming numbers and he determined to retreat to the river. A moment later the whole command was dashing for the river in a confused mass, with the Indians racing after them on all sides firing away at short range with their Winchester rifles.

All the way to the river the soldiers were slaughtered, and at the ford the rout was horrible.

The soldiers and horses plunged in, crowded together, and the red fiends shot down the huddled mass of fugitives without resistance.

The foremost, with Reno among them, gained the bluffs.

And just then Yellowstone Jack, with Benteen's men, came dashing to meet them.

The boy prairie courier had safely carried the order of Custer to Captain Benteen.

A moment later, far down the stream, they heard the volleys of musketry.

Then the fire of the reds behind Reno ceased, and away they all went toward the village, leaving the commands of Reno and Benteen on the hill.

The firing down the river increased every moment. The volleys were so close and incessant, they knew an awful conflict must be taking place.

Custer was fighting there!

Reno's force was demoralized. The officer had lost his head.

He waited until Benteen came up and also McDougal with the pack train.

All the time the firing down the river continued.

Yellowstone Jack believed that Custer was in deadly peril.

He urged Reno and Benteen to go to his assistance, but they delayed.

Only one officer seemed to share the belief of the boy prairie courier, that Custer was hemmed in.

That officer was Captain Weir, a devoted friend of Custer.

The remnant of the Seventh Cavalry made a breastwork on the hill, and there defended themselves, repulsing every assault of the enemy.

For three days the battle raged. Sometimes the Indians charged right up to the breastworks and the cavalry lost heavily.

But on the third day the Indians suddenly fled, and the cause was speedily made known, for Gen. Terry's column came up in the afternoon.

Then the soldiers went over the route Custer had followed into the valley, whence they had heard those terrible volleys on the 25th, and there they learned the awful truth.

There, in the valley of the Little Big Horn, lay Custer and his five companies, every man dead.

The trail showed that Custer had gone down to the river and charged toward a ford, where he was met by the Indians and driven back.

The line of Custer's retreat was marked by dead bodies to the top of a small hill, where he made his last stand.

There, on the top of the hill, lay Custer dead, with his officers around him.

Yellowstone Jack had fought like a hero, but he burst into tears when he beheld the dead body of Custer.

Suddenly the boy felt a hand on his shoulder, and turning, he beheld Curley, the Crow scout. The latter had been with Custer.

He was the only man who got out of the fight alive, by disguising himself in a Sioux blanket and creeping away after Custer fell.

Curley told how the Indians in vast numbers surrounded Custer, and how they charged again and again and were driven back each time as long as Custer lived. How every man had died like a hero. When Custer died the remnant was all massacred. The historian says:

"The greatest testimonial to the valor of Custer was found, however, in one wonderful fact. Among all the dead, stripped and hacked to pieces, without another exception, Custer lay with a bullet in his brain, another in his heart, but otherwise untouched."

* * * * *

A few days later, while the soldiers were preparing to follow the Sioux, and forces were concentrating to pursue them, Curley and Yellowstone Jack while out on a scout came upon Zadok, the renegade, and captured him. They marched him into camp, and he was held a prisoner. That same day the lone scout and Ethel came into camp. The lone scout, knowing of the arrival of the strong column of Terry, no longer feared to trust Ethel to the protection of the soldiers.

Zadok was tried by a military court, convicted as a hostile and shot. But before he died he made a confession which exonerated Jasper Readon, the lone scout, from the suspicion of a crime.

A strong party, commanded by the lone scout, and of which the boy prairie courier was a member, was sent back to Fort Lincoln with Ethel.

They reached the fort in safety.

Thereafter the brave border boy cultivated the acquaintance of the paymaster's daughter to such good purpose that some years later the beautiful young girl, who had shared so many perils with Gen. Custer's youngest aide, became his happy bride.

The lone scout made his home with the young couple, who were thereafter prosperous and happy.

Curley, the Crow scout, came to visit them at the fort quite frequently.

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